BELARUSIAN REVIEW



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EDITORIAL

President Lukashenka: Search for Survival

In the summer 2002 issue of BR, I wrote on this page that Lukashenka had three options to consider in view of Putin's proposal for integrating Belarus into the Russian Federation: accept Putin's demand, expand ties with the rogue states, or turn to the West.

Lukashenka saw no future in accepting full integration of Belarus into the Russian Federation as this meant an end to his dream of ever assuming a seat in the Kremlin. He couldn't turn to the West with which he was at odds over its demand for democratic reforms in Belarus, which would mean the end to his autocratic rule. So he continued the game of being a union state with Russia, collecting Russian subsidies while expanding his contacts with countries hostile to the United States so that he could sell arms to them. (According to the American market intelligence firm Forecast International, Belarus is among the top arms exporting countries in the world.)

Russia had no intention of letting Belarus slip from her grip and realized its political pressure alone was not enough to make Belarus a part of the Russian Federation. The next step was to apply raw economic power. In January 2007, Russia stopped the delivery of natural gas to Belarus. Lukashenka immediately retaliated by turning off the flow of gas to Western Europe. This got Europe's immediate attention and the gas flow was restored. In January 2006, Russia doubled the price on its gas to Belarus and followed with the removal of preferential oil tariffs.

The final blow came when Russia prevailed in forcing Belarus to sell a 50 percent share of the Belarusian government-owned Beltransgaz gas distribution network to Russian company Gazprom. The Belarusian government will receive $2.5 billion over a period of 4 years. (What's next on the auction block?)

To mobilize public opinion in his fight against Moscow, Lukashenka turned into a "nationalist," defending Belarus' independence and sovereignty. To this end, he even invoked the 1994 memorandum on security assurances for Belarus, which the heads of state of the US, United Kingdom, Russia and Belarus signed at the Budapest CSCE summit, making a commitment to respect "the independence and sovereignty and the existing borders of the Republic of Belarus."

Lukashenka then began looking for partners with whom he could make a deal. He sought support from the EU and from countries hostile to the West, mainly Venezuela and Iran, both rich in oil and gas resources. He hosted Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez last year and Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad this May, with both visitors proclaiming great unity with the host, opposition to the United States, and a promise to help solve Belarus' energy crisis.

The US: The US position toward Belarus reflects a high degree of disappointment. High hopes in 1991 were followed by a 180-degree turn when Lukashenka became president of Belarus in 1994. Calling Lukashenka "the last dictator in Europe," the US Department of State naively thought that "Russia is a great friend of Belarus" and "cooperating with Russia can help democracy in Belarus" (Daniel Fried, interview with BelaPAN, Warsaw, July 11, 2005).

On the eve of the last year's G-8 summit, we urged the US Department of State to place Belarus on the G-8 summit agenda, but our appeals fell on deaf ears. Only Canada responded positively with its Foreign Minister Peter MacKay raising the issue of the Belarus situation at the G-8 ministerial level.

Most recently, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State David Kramer visited Belarus on April 23 and met with Foreign Minister Martynau, the deputy head of the Presidential Administration, leaders and activists of the opposition, representatives of the civil society and human rights and student groups, and families of political prisoners and the disappeared.

At a press conference, he said the US was prepared to respond positively if the Belarusian government would take "minimum steps" toward democratic reform. Those first steps, he said, should include the release of all political prisoners and allowing peaceful demonstrations to take place. He stated that the US was prepared to increase pressure if necessary.

On the way to the G-8 summit in Germany, President George Bush spoke in Prague on June 5, where he said, "... I want to thank very much the [Czech] government for stepping up and supporting those who ...don't have the opportunity to speak for themselves, whether it will be the dissenters in Belarus or in Cuba." He also met with a group of some 50 dissidents from various countries, including Belarusian former presidential candidate Aleksandar Milinkevich and Ms. Iryna Krasouskaya, whose husband was among the disappeared. Subsequently, in his statements in Poland, Germany, and other European countries that he visited after the G-8 summit, President Bush referred to Belarus as a country with no freedoms or respect for human rights.

The EU: Over the years, in deference to Russia's trade potential and its gas supply, the EU showed no interest in Belarus as long as the Russian gas passing through Belarus was arriving on time. It was only when Lukashenka got into a quarrel with Russia over the gas price hike, and retaliated by turning off the flow of gas to Europe that got the EU's attention.

The other event that stirred up the EU was the rigged presidential election in March 2006 in which opposition candidates Milinkevich and Kazulin ran against Lukashenka with the opposition taking to the streets and occupying a main square in Minsk. While the world offered sympathy, Lukashenka retaliated by having his goons beat up the young people and sent Kazulin to jail for 5 years and others for shorter terms. The EU soon established contact with the civil society of Belarus with Milinkevich serv-

ing as the main link. Russia's backsliding from democracy was another factor having an effect of enhancing the fight for Belarus.

Under the German EU chairmanship, the EU made clear that it was ready to engage in a constructive dialogue with Belarus if it would free political prisoners. It should be noted that the EU has decided on June 15 to withdraw preferential trade preferences for Belarus for certain items for its failure to reform labor rights. This will not affect gas and oil exports that pass through Belarus to Western Europe.

Conclusion: The whole national structure Lukashenka built rests on two legs; one of the legs is Lukashenka, the other, Russia. If one of the legs falters, the whole structure collapses. In the physical world, structures that are supported by three legs have a better chance of surviving an earthquake. Belarus is missing that third leg.

Historically, Belarus belongs to Europe. Two centuries of Russian colonial rule doesn't make that less so. The period of colonialism is over, thank God, and the world should not stand idly by, watching while Russia tries to re-colonize Belarus. Today we have a community of democracies in Europe known as the European Union. The EU should get much more involved so that the police state under Lukashenka changes its ways and the Belarusian people are given a chance to join that community.

Joe Arciuch
Editor-at-Large

From the Publisher

Uladzimier (Uladzia) Katkouski worked in Prague as the Web-editor for RFE/RL Belarus Broadcast Service, and as the Internet Monitor for this publication.

A year ago, he and his wife were the victims of a horrendous accident in Prague, when a speeding fire engine, in order to avoid a street car, ran onto the sidewalk, injuring a number of people. His wife suffered grave injuries, Uladzia never came out of a deep coma. He passed away on May 26.



Uladzia Katkouski

Still in his twenties, he was a dominant figure in Belarusian cyberspace. He was one of the creators of the website that listed all Belarusians who were repressed or killed by the Stalinist regime, the website www.svaboda.org was recognized as the best at RFE/RL, he initiated the creation of Belarusian-language Google. His website www.br23.net won the Grand Prix in 2006 among all Belarusian entries.

Nearly hundred bloggers paid tribute to Uladzimier in their diaries on the day of his passing. It was a tragic blow for the Belarusian nation.

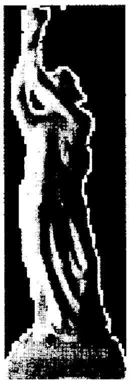
Also in May, we lost another colleague. **Alex Silwanowicz** handled a number of administrative tasks for our publication. He passed on at 70, after a lengthy illness.

Alex was active in many areas of Belarusian-American community's life. He was the co-Chairman of the Coalition in Defense of Democracy and Human rights in Belarus, participating in many of diaspora's many official delegations. He very effectively aided the CityHope charitable organization in the distribution of millions dollars worth of medicines to those suffering in Belarus from the effects of the Chernobyl disaster. Alex served practically his whole life in a number of capacities in the Belarusian Autocephalic Orthodox Church, starting out as an altar boy and concluding as a lay leader.

His extensive computer skills and advice will be missed by many whom he selflessly helped out to become computer literate.

The Victims of Communism Memorial

The BNR Rada President Ivonka Survilla and other representatives of Belarusian diaspora attended the dedication in Washington, DC on June 12, 2007. In numerous interviews, she indicated that the Belarusian people and the newly independent Belarusian Democratic Republic were among the first victims.



President George W. Bush spoke before a crowd of 1,000 including Congressional leaders, members of the diplomatic corps, ethnic leaders, foreign dignitaries, and Memorial supporters. Rep. Tom Lantos, chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, gave the keynote address while Rep. Dana Rohrabacher delivered remarks.

The day's activities concluded with a gala, at which a Truman-Reagan Medal of Freedom was presented to William F. Buckley, Jr., and the late Senator Henry M. (Scoop) Jackson



The groundbreaking started in 2006
Joseph Lawler of National Park Service;
Under Secretary of State Paula Dobriansky;
VOC memorial Foundation Chairman Lee Edwards;
Congressman Dana Rohrabacher

FEATURES

Severin Attacks Belarus On Human Rights

By David Marples

A speech by Adrian Severin, special rapporteur, to the 5th session of the Human Rights Council (HRC) of the UN General Assembly in Geneva on the worsening human rights situation in Belarus in 2006 has caused fury in Minsk. Belarus's permanent representative at the UN, Syarhey Aleynik, has called on the Council to annul Severin's mandate and attacked his credentials.

Last month, the UN General Assembly turned down Belarus' request for a seat on the HRC, offering the two seats available for East European countries to Slovenia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. A report from Human Rights Watch, assessing the Belarusian bid for HRC membership, chronicled the wide gap between the country's pledges and "the reality" of the human rights problems within Belarus. The analysis commented that the government of Belarus had failed to cooperate with the HRC, and the Special Rapporteur in particular, and that "all efforts to engage in constructive dialogue" have been futile (Human Rights Watch, May 17).

It maintains also that at least seven other "special procedures mandate holders" made assessments similar to those of Severin and sent several urgent appeals to the Belarusian government. Most received no response; others merited a peremptory reply. Special representatives on human rights and torture requested permission to visit Belarus but were not invited to do so. In spite of a pledge to observe international human rights, Belarus failed to live up to its commitments during the 2006 presidential elections, detaining activists, obstructing access to the state media for opposition candidates, and failing to ensure a transparent vote count. As a result, the HRC representatives declared that Belarus' application for HRC membership was "nothing less than scandalous" (HR, May 17).

Severin elaborated on these criticisms in his subsequent report to the UN on June 12, noting that all the recommendations made earlier to Belarus had been ignored, and the government had once again refused to cooperate, even refusing him entry into the country. In 2006, he commented, the human rights situation in that country worsened. He is seeking an official legal inquiry into missing and presumed dead journalists and senior political figures and the extent to which government officials were involved in these events. His conclusions, he asserts, are supported by many European organizations, including the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE, the Council of Europe, the European Parliament, and the Parliamentary Assembly of NATO (*Belorusskaya delovaya gazeta*, June 12).

Belarus, through the figure of Aleynik, has responded to this devastating criticism by trying to undermine the credibility of the speaker, a reputable 53-year-old Romanian lawyer and politician. The report, according to Aleynik, is the product of an incompetent and politically engaged expert, desirous of creating a negative image of Belarus. Such a partisan attack constitutes interference in the sovereign affairs of the country, because it demands a change of political leadership, a revamping of the social-economic structure, providing technical and financial aid to non-government organs, and altering the "national mentality." Therefore the mandate of this political activist should be annulled and the fulfillment of such a request would determine whether the HRC is able to overcome a legacy of political confrontations (*Belorusskaya delovaya gazeta*, June 13).

Ironically, the latest publicity on the human rights situation in Belarus comes after the release of two prominent political detainees ahead of their official sentences, namely Youth Front leader Paval Sevyarinets and erstwhile Social Democratic party leader Mikola Statkevich (Belorusskie novosti, May 30). However, other prominent figures, such as former rector of the Belarusian State University and 2006 presidential candidate Alyaksandr Kazulin (detained on March 25, 2006), and Young Front activist Paval Krasouski (detained on October 5, 2006) remain incarcerated. Amnesty International considers the former to be a "prisoner of conscience" (Amnesty International, January 5) and his 5.5 year sentence under Articles 339 and 342 of the Criminal Code, particularly harsh.

The government has never explained satisfactorily the disappearances of prominent politicians Viktar Hanchar and Yuri Zakharenka, businessman Anatol Krasouski, and cameraman Dzmitry Zavadsky, in 1999-2000. Two presidential elections (2001 and 2006) and three referendums (1995, 1996, and 2004) have been subjected to very strong international criticism.

Severin's report is particularly problematic for the Minsk government because it comes at a time when the regime is trying to revamp its image in European eyes. President Alyaksandr Lukashenka stated earlier this year that he would welcome advice from German Chancellor Angela Merkel and that either Germany or Switzerland might be suitable models for his state rather than a union with Russia (*Die Welt*, January 29). Yet Germany, which currently occupies the presidency of the Council of the EU, was notably supportive of Severin's remarks. Outside Europe, the United States and Canada also expressed their concern over the violations of human rights by the government of Belarus (Belorusskaya delovaya gazeta, June 13).

Such criticisms are not new, but they come during a difficult period for Belarusian-Russian relations, as illustrated by Lukashenka's remarks about the problems of the Russia-Belarus Union (Interfax, May 29). Increasingly, the president's visits to foreign countries as well as visitors to Minsk are limited to states that have shunned any pretensions to democracy: Iran, North Korea, China, and Venezuela. Official Belarus has few friends and for the moment the European avenue as a possible alternative to closer ties with Russia, has been firmly closed. A year into its third term the Lukashenka administration seems more isolated than ever.

Source: Eurasia Daily Monitor, , June 14, 2007

Belarus: An Outpost of Old Europe?

By Yury Drakakhrust

Some people are beginning to ask the questions: What role will Belarus play in the European Union? Will it end up among the countries that former U.S. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld dubbed "New Europe," or will it become an eastern stronghold for such states as Germany and France? The very question sounds bizarre since Belarus, which is referred to as "the last dictatorship of Europe" on both sides of the Atlantic, has slim chances of becoming a EU member in the foreseeable future. Yet the world today is changing so rapidly that nothing should be taken for granted. The dramatic turn in relations that occurred between such close allies as Moscow and Minsk in late 2006 and early 2007, as well as Alexander Lukashenka's warming to the West, only shows that nothing can be ruled out.

EAST OR WEST?

Many Russian authors tend to describe the ongoing political struggles in Belarus in terms of an age-old confrontation between Rus (Old Russia) and Poland. Numerous studies are devoted to the analysis of "Polish intrigue" – i.e., Warsaw's dream about the restoration of Rzeczpospolita to its former glory. These writers demonstrate a good knowledge of history. Indeed, they observe that in the early 20th century, Polish cultural and ideological influence on Belarus was as strong as Russian influence.

A recurring theme in *Tuteishya* (Locals, or Natives), a play by Belarusian classic playwright Yanka Kupala, is the confrontation between East and West, personified by two respective scholars. The Eastern scholar, dressed in a poddyovka (a Russian light tight-fitting coat), and a kosovorotka (a Russian shirt with collar fastening at side), writes in his notebook that "the natural resources of Russia's Northwestern Province are vast and abundant, but as for the province's political borders, native Russians living here have a very vague idea about them; still, there is a pronounced desire to extend them in the direction of the West."

The Western scholar, dressed in a konfederatka (Polish national headgear – rectangular cap with no peak) and kuntush (kind of coat worn by Polish noblemen), writes that "natural scenery on the eastern outskirts of Rzeczpospolita is diverse and luxuriant, but as for the province's borders, native Poles living here have a rather vague idea about them; still, there is a pronounced desire to extend them to the East."

The playwright's sarcasm is understandable, but the symmetry of the characters' perceptions shows that their cultural influence, at least, is approximately the same.

It is noteworthy that even now, Polish authors seem to take no issue with the theory advanced by some of their Russian counterparts about Poland's powerful influence on Belarus. Although no one dreams about Rzeczpospolita from coast to coast, Poland's role as a guide to Europe, mentor in the art of democracy, and a kind of "big brother" for the Belarusians, appears to be desirable and even necessary.

History, however, has played a nasty trick on Belarus's two great neighbors: Both forget that since Kupala's play [*Tuteishya* was written in 1922 – Ed.] the Belarusians have changed considerably.

To understand the specifics of the Belarusian mentality today, it would be appropriate to consider the following excerpt from an article by Ales Chobat, which centers around a conversation between a Belarusian nationalist and a group of peasants soon after the country proclaimed its independence in 1991:

"Alexei," one of them asks, "who will be our master now?"

"What do you mean, 'master'?" the artist asks. "We'll be on our own. Independent."

"Oh come on," the man replies, losing his patience. "There are no questions about independence or being on our own. Surely no one is going to feed us. But who will be our master now?"

"And what do you think?" the artist asked laughing. He liked the naivety of these simple people.

"Ah, that's why we came," the villagers said. "Some people say that we will be under the Poles whereas others believe we will be under the Germans."

"Which would you prefer?" the artist asked.

"It's all the same to us," they said. "But it looks like it will be the Germans after all."

"Why Germans?"

"Well, how many Poles are there? But the Germans, they are a great force."

THE POLISH TRAIL

The writer's argument may not be very compelling, but even such an objective source as the census (1999) shows that Polish influence on Belarus is problematic, to say the least.

Source: (http://www.polit.ru/research/2004/10/15/population_print.htm

Why more than one-half of Belarusians speak Russian at home is a separate and rather uncomfortable subject. What is really striking about the figures given in Table 1 is that the share of ethnic Poles speaking Belarusian at home is higher than the share of ethnic Belarusians. At the same time, the vast majority of ethnic Russians speak Russian at home. If an ethnic minority is assimilated even more than an indigenous ethnic group, there is little cause to say that this minority has a particular strong cultural influence.

During the 2006 presidential campaign in Belarus, many Russian publications repeatedly reminded their readers that Alexander Milinkevich, the main opposition candidate, was a Catholic. The record was never set straight (Milinkevich is an Orthodox Christian) partly due to the strange position adopted by many Russian media outlets during the election campaign and partly due to the aforementioned tunnel vision: all things pro-Western in Belarus come from Poland and Catholicism.

This may be how the situation is seen from Moscow, but the Belarusian reality is somewhat different. Even the relationship between Belarusian Catholicism and "Polishness"

is far more complex than it might appear to an outside observer. It may be recalled that the Belarusian national-democratic opposition, in the early 1990s, was the first to demand that the number of Catholic (Polish-born) priests in Belarus be reduced.

Here is another revealing passage in an article by Piatrus Rudkouski, a well-known Belarusian journalist and member of the Dominican Order: "It has to be recognized that the consensus between the Hrodna clergy with respect to the mission to defend 'Polishness' is rather strong, while any attempts to introduce Belarusian at Roman Catholic churches are rebuffed by the uncompromising fighters for the status quo." Carrying on the polemics with Roman Dzwonkowski, a Roman Catholic priest and professor at Lublin Catholic University, Rudkouski writes: "Does Dzwonkowski not know about the atmosphere of disdain for and discrimination against all things Belarusian that exists among the Hrodna clergy? Or has the respected professor never heard Polish Catholic priests quote with relish the admission made by one old woman: 'Belarusian can be spoken in a cowb shed or barn, but never in the Catholic church'?"
(http://arche.bymedia.net/2005-1/rudkouski105.htm).

According to Rudkouski, "most of Lukashenka's opponents are members of the pro-Belarusian Catholic movement. At the same time, local Catholics who identify themselves as 'Poles' are strongly attached to 'collective farm ethics,' which provides an excellent refuge for those unable to join broader cultures – Polish, Belarusian or Russian. These are mostly elderly, poorly educated people who promote an environment of 'Polishness' in the Hrodna Region. For these people, Lukashenka represents a guarantor of an accustomed lifestyle, while to Lukashenka, they are the most reliable part of the electorate."

The general tone of Rudkouski's article is that nationalism, Catholicism, Poland and Europe are concepts that are not exactly identical, to say the least. Furthermore, the Belarusian Catholic intelligentsia is oftentimes especially wary of attempts to expand Polish influence in Belarus. Unsurprisingly, the problem as to which language is spoken in the Belarusian Catholic Church worries Rudkouski, who is a Catholic, more than it worries his Orthodox soul mates.

It would be appropriate here to provide some general statistics about the "faith structure" in Belarus. The majority of the population is Orthodox Christian, falling within the jurisdiction of the Belarusian Exarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church (between 73 percent and 80 percent). Roman Catholics are in second place (13-15 percent), and finally the Protestants, accounting for about 2 percent, more than half of them Christian Evangelists. According to the Committee for Religious Affairs at the Belarusian Council of Ministers, as of 2002, there were 1,224 Orthodox parishes, 432 Roman Catholic parishes, 35 Old Rite parishes, 491 Christian Evangelist communities, 270 Christian Baptist communities, 61 traditional Evangelist communities, 51 Seventh Day Adventist communities, 25 Judaic communities, 11 Progressive Judaic communities, 26 Jehovah's Witness communities, 27 Muslim communities, 20 New Apostolic communities, 14 Greco-Catholic communities, and 13 eastern religious communities.

One-half of Roman Catholic communities are concentrated in the Grodno Region, which has the highest proportion of ethnic Poles in Belarus (about 25 percent). But simple calculations show that Belarusian Catholics are not only and not even so much ethnic Poles (the latter account for around 4 percent of the country's population, as compared to 13-15 percent of Catholics).

But if being "pro-European" in Belarus does not mean being "pro-Polish," what does it mean then? An answer to this question is partially provided by Table 2, based on a poll conducted by the Independent Institute for Socio-Economic and Political Studies in May 2006.

PRO-GERMAN

Needless to say, the figures given in Table 2 are largely the result of massive state propaganda blackening certain countries that are especially disliked by the Belarusian ruling authorities. But it would be wrong to reduce everything to the manipulation of public opinion: Germany's high ratings as compared to Belarus's, for example, are clearly at odds with the objectives of state propaganda.

Germany's high approval ratings are also confirmed by other polls: Respondents generally see the country as a role model for Belarus, while German leaders (Helmut Kohl, Gerhard Schroeder, and Angela Merkel) appear to be more popular than leaders of East European countries or the United States. Germany is among the top five countries in terms of "friendliness of foreign policy" with respect to Belarus – together with Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and China.

This 'Germanophile' attitude is all the more amazing given that Belarus lost one in four of its citizens (according to some sources, one in three) in World War II. The war is still a crucial element of Belarus's state ideology.

The Belarusians' geopolitical preferences were confirmed by a recent poll that was taken in May 2006.

There are several points worth considering in Table 3. In polls conducted over the past few years, about one-third of Belarusians say they think the country should join the EU. But the actual number of latent pro-EU Belarusians appears to be higher: about one-half of respondents give preference to "Old Europe" (on the assumption that Belarus becomes an EU member).

In another poll, respondents were asked what ethnic groups they were prepared to see as their sons-in-law, daughters-in-law, co-workers or neighbors. Belarusians seem to feel the strongest affinity for ethnic Russians, while the runners-up are Ukrainians and Poles. West Europeans ranked next (Britons, French, Germans, etc.), together with people from Central Europe (Czechs, Slovaks, Hungarians, Serbs, etc.). Next came Lithuanians, Jews, Latvians, and only after them, Americans, natives of Central Asia, Arabs, Caucasians, and so on.

On the one hand, ethnic Poles and Ukrainians rank second and third in terms of their affinity with the Belarusian people. In this respect, Belarusians differ greatly from Russians, who do not regard Poles as one of their own.

On the other hand, West Europeans rank ahead of all other nations, while the reason for this is hardly their apparent affluence alone: the Americans, for example, are at least just as well-off economically, but the social distance between the two people seems to be considerably larger.

Poles remain one of the closest nations to Belarus, but Poland's powerful ideological and cultural influence is history now. Today, Poland is not much of a role model for the pro-Western minded Belarusians who are oriented mostly toward "Old Europe," primarily Germany. At the same time, the obvious political distance from the U.S. is the result of official propaganda, among other things.

Changes in Belarus's political situation and its ideological guidelines may alter these geopolitical preferences but can hardly do so in a radical way.

But if these guidelines remain essentially unchanged and Belarus becomes a member of the European Union, its role in Europe will differ substantially from that which is played by the "newcomers" (those admitted in 2004) today: Belarus will be on the border on "New and Old Europe," an outpost of "Old Europe" in the east of the European continent.

Yury Drakakhrust is a Belarusian journalist.

Source: www.belarusnews.de, 12.06.2007 :

SPORTS

Belarusian Athlete Defeats Famous Rivals

Andrey Krauchanka, a 21-year old Belarusian became a sensational winner of a world-renowned decathlon meet in Götzis, Austria on May 27, 2007.



He defeated the world record holder Roman Sebrle of the Czech Republic and the favored American Brian Clay. In doing so, he collected 8217 points and improved his his personal record by incredible 604 points.

Krauchanka is the junior world decathlon champion and a former world record holder in his age category.

Andrey's best performance until now was 8013 points. He hopes for further improvement next year, possibly by bettering Sebrle's world record of 9026 points.

Here are his results in individual disciplines :

100 m. sprint ... 10,86 sec.
Long jump ... 7,90 m
High jump ... 2,15 m.
Shot Put ... 13,89 m.
400 m. run ... 47,46 sec.
110 m. hurdles ... 14,05 sec.
Discus Throw ... 39,63 m.
Pole Vault ... 5,00 m.
JavelinThrow ... 64,35 m.
1500 m. run ... 4:29,10 sec.

BELARUS' FORUM

You are the Creators Of Our Nation

Address by Alaksandr Milinkevich on March 25, 2007

I greet you, free citizens!

I greet you, the courageous and honest people. You are the salt of our land - the creators of our nation. Thank you for coming to the Square today. Thank you for coming with flowers, flags and posters.

They want us to stay home. They say: "Our business is to govern — yours is to work. These are our squares; you go to the marsh of the Bangalor (square)."

No! The source of power are we, the people. These are our squares and our state. We celebrate the 25th of March - the Day of the Will - as our greatest holiday, because on that day the Belarusian people assumed the responsibility for its country, for its independence. Today only democracy can guarantee our independence.

Today thousands, representing the Belarusian Will should be heard and seen from the windows of the official TV, lying about " few hundreds morons ", from the bell towers of churches on the Square of Freedom, from the offices of a president who forgot Kalinouski's words about the government for the people, and not the other way around...

Belarus will become democratic. When? I am being asked. There is no answer to this question. The main thing is that the change takes place without bloodshed. Then it will be irreversible.

Belarusians do not accept violence. In our struggle for freedom we have not shed a drop of blood. It is they who shed our blood. Yes, it is our people who languish in prisons.

Easy victories occur only in movies One doesn't accomplish them in one attempt. We have to fight for our freedom in attempt after attempt, month after month, year after year.

Europe offers us its help. It says: don't be afraid — we will support you. Europe consists of small countries, small as Belarus. They know the price of independence, and how difficult it is to achieve it.

We have here today members of the Europarliament, our friends from the whole world. They came to support us. Let us express our sincere gratitude to them.

I am often being asked: who will win and who will lose due to freedom? Everyone will win due to freedom. There is no paradox here: even those who are afraid of freedom today, will win and remember these words in the future.

Freedom is a movement, including the Movement "For Freedom." These pretty girls in orange-colored shirts are now enlisting new members of the Movement "For Freedom."

Belarus is beginning its movement toward freedom — the Movement For Freedom!

Make xerox copies of independent newspapers. Get and distribute leaflets. Pass from hand to hand films, disks and books. Tear down their propaganda. Be stubborn and hold on to your values. Protest against every lie and injustice — loud or in silence.

Let everyone of you write a letter to our political prisoners — our heroes. I recently visited Paval Sieviaryniets. Courageous Paval send his greeting to the capital city. Freedom to political prisoners !

The Belarusian Will means freedom as well as decisiveness. The Belarusian society today lacks the will of freedom and the will of decisiveness. This is why today the Day of Will has to become the day of our decisiveness.

Freedom and decisiveness require presenting concrete demands to the regime, demands freely listed by any democratic activist and easily remembered by any official.

These demands are:
Freedom and Independence of Belarus;
Freedom to political prisoners,
Freedom of choice!
Freedom of expression!

Right now the regime-supported youth organization (BRSM) is staging a concert "For Independent Belarus." Look: we have achieved the recognition of 25th of March as a national holiday.

Freedom and decisiveness do not mean threading water and listening to speeches. Freedom is a movement.

Long Live Belarus!

Source: *Nasha Niva,* March 26, 2007, received from A. Milinkevich press-service.

HISTORICAL DATES

July 7, 1882

Janka Kupala (Ivan Lucevic), a great Belarusian poet, was born in Viazynka, near the town of Maladecna.

Kupala may be considered one of the founders of the modern Belarusian literature, whose patriotic poetry significantly contributed to Belarus' national awakening in the 20th century.

In addition to his literary activities, he was a valuable civic leader ,and the editor of the *Nasa Niva* newspaper in the 1910s.

He died tragically in Moscow in 1942.

July 7, 1887

Mark Chagall, one of the most significant painters and graphic artists of the 20th century, was born in Viciebsk. Between 1915 and 1917 he lived in St. Petersburg, Russia; after the Russian Revolution he was the director of the Art Academy in Viciebsk from 1918 to 1919, and the art director of the Moscow Jewish State Theater from 1919 to 1922. In 1923 he moved to France, where he spent the rest of his life.

Cultural Reconfiguration Of Belarus

This article by Siarhey Bohdan has made it to the top of *Nasha Niva* ratings, and drew a wave of comments. The author implies that, contrary to the pessimistic mood in opposition circles, the Belarusian culture is making huge strides in its development. The comments range from full support of the author to the fierce criticism of him as being too optimistic.

Below you will find a short summary of the article:

Belarusians are achieving one success after another in shaping their nation

The crisis is one of the main categories of the Western way of thinking, the Iranian philosopher Larijani once wrote. Living in the countries with the highest income per capita, Europeans are constantly discussing their crises and the ways out of them. This feverish invention of crises and solutions resulted in the immense material upsurge of western European civilization. The people in other parts of the world could care less and believed that the bananas on their trees are growing just fine. The Europeans have created the invention race, and, competing with themselves, have conquered the world.

Being a young man, I've been hearing speeches about the crisis situation with the Belarusian language since the day I was born. But, comparing the former and the present state of the Belarusian language, I am getting more and more convinced by the "crisis theory". The Belarusians have sensed the crisis and have begun to fight it. We simply lack confidence in our strength. And positive thinking.

The national rebirth: score is in our favor.

Despite the referendum of 1995 (which "reinstalled" Russian for use as an official language in Belarus, together with Belarusian), the decline in state support to the Belarusian-language books, and the shrinking number of Belarusian-language periodicals, the positive changes outweigh the shortcomings.

1. The Belarusian language got rid of its plebeian and "village" status. It modernized itself and feels itself at home in big cities. Only the abandoning of the "village" orientation in literature has managed to make the language more healthy and attractive.

2. The non-Soviet standard of language was revived, which is not plagued by Russian grammar and vocabulary, artificially injected into the language by the Soviets in 1930's. This allows the language to function in all spheres of modern society.

3. The language and culture acquired their intelligent carriers and masters. To be more exact, the masters claimed their rights. We must create everything anew. The colonial heritage is falling apart; the Belarusian culture and nation are being developed on its ruins. How can one feel sorry, that only 37% of Belarusians during the 1999 census said that they use the Belarusian language in their daily life? 37% already, despite all the post-1995 state politics, declared their wish to speak Belarusian! This is a huge success.

4. The new generation of creators and carriers of the Belarusian culture emerged. One shouldn't judge the state of Belarusian culture based on the official information sources. Just take what appeared in the recent years – from Balakhonau (the young Belarusian author) to "Dzeyaslou" (the independent cultural magazine) - and think whether we've had anything like that before.

5. The process of the development of the national culture and language is now natural in its character. This means that it doesn't depend on state financial support. As soon as one stops hoping to get some money from the state, the vision clears, and one notices that the Belarusian culture does not degrade, but fixes the deformations of the soviet times, when the laws controlled the muse.

6. The culture and the language have opened themselves to the world. Now thousands of Belarusians are studying abroad; the Belarusian culture has overcome the borders of the former empire. There have never been so many translations to and from Belarusian, and our fellow countrymen travel all over the world and open for us new cultures – from the Finnish to the Afghan. And those are not immigrants of the soviet times, pushed away by their native surrounding, and writing for no one, with their works never making it to their homeland. No, these are the people, who are traveling from one culture to another, developing the communication.

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The Belarusian culture is successful. Don't panic. If you do something, it is always important to recognize your successes and be proud of them – it helps in further work. In order to secure this success, we must continue working to revive the civil society, independent of the state.

Siarhey Bohdan

Brothers with arms

On Monday, Febr. 5, 2007 the Russian radio station *Echo of Moscow* conducted an opinion poll. The question was "Do you think, that Russia should bring in Russian troops into Belarus in order to protect the *Druzhba* oil pipeline?"

36% of listeners called the radio in order to say "yes", 64% were against such a move.

The internet-audience of the radio station appeared to be more peaceful. 26% were for the "military solution", 71% were against it. 3% hesitated.

Echo of Moscow is one of the most progressive and liberal radio stations in Russia. It reflects the opinion of the most tolerant and intelligent part of the Russian society. One can only imagine, what the conservatives think. So much for the "eternal friendship" between the two "brother nations".

Alex Kudrytski, *Nasha Niva* Blogs, February 10, 2007

Scylla Defeating Charybdis: WW2 in Belarus

*Reflections on the official holiday of Victory Day, 9th of May, 2007 by Ales Cajcyc for **Pozirk.org**.*
Translated from Belarusian by eolonir and vox populi.

The Ninth of May. The "red day" as it is also known, one marked red both in the calendars and in peoples' memories. The Victory day. The day which I can't help calling the day of Pobeda. (Pobeda means "victory" in Russian, whereas in Belarusian it is called "pieramoha"). I catch myself at trying to use this Russian word in my language. The Russian and Soviet clichés and stereotypes are rooted too deeply in my mind – it is difficult to separate the Soviet myth and Soviet name of the event from the actual event.

In the Soviet mythology the victory over Fascist Germany in the Great Patriotic War – *Vialikaj Ajchynnaj Vajnie* (in Belarusian) — *Velikoj Otecheestvennoj Vojnie* (in Russian) was a part of a long and awesome epic story about the power of communism. Soviet propaganda aligned all anti-communist movements, among them the "White Army", the Western Democracies, the Belarusian Liberation movements under one category — the enemies of communism, the dark forces. Victory over the Nazis was presented as the first step to the world communism domination.

Such holidays are usually celebrated to honour a victory against an external enemy and to honour the national army which made that victory possible. For Russia, the predecessor and successor of the Soviet Union, this war had really been the national patriotic war, the war for the national liberation. One can understand that it might be possible for the question about crimes of Stalinist regime and terror inside the country to be moved down the agenda – considering the threat to the existence of Russia as a country. The Russians were fighting for the very right to exist. Incidentally, the tradition to commemorate victories long after they have taken place is typical of Moscow – the 1812 Victory or taking over Kazan' had been celebrated for decades.

Lukashenka's Belarus has added another, special meaning to the celebrations of the 9th of May. Having no ideological or metaphorical grounding on which to build up the state system, the regime keeps grappling at the remnants of the past, at these emotional Soviet symbols. Moreover, it enslaves the present within the remnants of totalitarian past. How "patriotic" had this war been for those who had been occupied themselves? How much of a holiday is this for Belarus?

Liberating from the liberators

The fact is simple: no party in that war should be considered an ally of Belarus and a representative of its interests. Both communists and Nazis have made enough good and bad things for us.

Communists have tolerated our conditional sovereignty within the USSR. Belarus existed as a marionette, but de-jure an independent state inside the Soviet Union. Soviet Socialist Republic of Belarus of the 1920ies represented to

at least some extent a reincarnation of the Belarusian People's Republic, when communistic government has allowed development of Belarusian culture and usage of our language – although that period had been quite short. At the same time the Germans returned private property, formed Belarusian National divisions and allowed using our national symbolics by local administrative units.

Acting in accord, the two had actually served for unification of the Western and Eastern parts of the country according to the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact. Before that Belarusians lived in two prisons, while after September 1939 all of them got into one Soviet cell. Albeit not for a long time – a month after the unification, Vilnia has been given to Lithuania and renamed to Vilnius. Also, the Belarusian-populated region of Bielastok (Bialystok) has been given as a present to Poland after the war.

Still, the criminal record of both "great leaders" is a great deal longer. Hitler has commenced a war which has taken every forth Belarusian life away. All acts of war perpetrated by the Nazi forces are widely known – and I perhaps even the Soviet propaganda did not inflate the count by a considerable margin. Slave labour in German factories, villages burnt with all their inhabitants, gallows stretching along village roads, atrocities of the Nazi who have lost all their resemblance to humans. Maly Trascianiec, Chatyn, Miensk ghetto. 800 thousand Belarusian Jews had perished in Nazi camps and as the result of Nazi "clearance raids". Every seventh victim of Holocaust originates from Belarus.

The Soviet Union has entered the Second World War in alliance with Hitler's Germany: the date of September 17, 1939 marked the date of another disaster in the European history as the Soviet Army acted in accord with the German counterparts and entered the Polish territory from the East. Pre-war Soviet period on the "newly liberated" territories had been short, but it had been enough for Western Belarus to get a taste of what its Eastern sister had been suffering for more than a decade already. Thousands of villagers and city dwellers who used to stand out either with their money, intelligence, or civil position, had been stripped of their property and exiled to Kazakhstan and Siberia. Tens of thousands have died on this road and their bodies had been thrown away from the dirty cargo trains where all these unlucky human beings had been traveling to their destinies. Thousands had been killed in Kurapaty, Vaskovicy forest by the Soviet NKVD. This list can be continued endlessly.

After the war was over, assimilation and repressions have restarted. Repressions against national culture in Soviet Latvia, for instance, are comparable to the long-term occupation and assimilation plans of the Nazis. Belarus has become a part of the evil Soviet project, a part of an empire which existed only for the sake of inflaming the Second and then — in perspective — the Third World War and would never stop until communism would dominate on the globe. Belarus was meant to become a platz-d'arms for the new invasion to the West — and the first victim to the returning blow in that awful apocalyptic war of the Soviet Union against the human civilization. The Chernobyl catastrophe happened to be the finishing chord . It has become a symbol of corruption, inefficiency, and what is more – indifference of the Moscow functionaries to the people of their "Western territories".

They only managed to do one thing right — either side liberated us from the other. However, every next liberator did not intend to leave himself afterwards.

Was the Soviet Union really better than the Nazi Germany? Can one totalitarian bloody system be better than another one? The only hope for the independent Belarus had been democratic Europe toppling Hitler and starting a new war against the USSR. Luckily for the world that wasn't ever meant to happen.

Commemoration Day

Flowers on the victims' graves and at the pedestals of monuments, tears in the eyes of people who were born many decades after this war was over. What would be the true meaning of this day for us after all?

It should become the Day of Memory. The day when we recall and commemorate one of the most tragic episodes of Belarusian history. The Day of Commemoration without militaristic pathetic parades, without blood-coloured "Victory Banners" and definitely without the mascarade shows on the renovated "Stalin defense line." On the other hand, this should not be a Day for SS-commemorating parades or demolishing the Soviet memorials. May 9th should become the day of the Belarusian soldiers fighting on different sides should be finally reconciled — they were fighting for one Belarus and for the right to live their lives as humans, not like animals. In the end what does it matter which uniform they used to wear — one of the Soviet Army, of the BKA (Belarusian Local Self-Defense), of the Anders Army or even of Waffen-SS. Uniforms of innocent victims are the same before the face of death.

Let the May 9th become the day to commemorate war and post-war forest partisanship and the anti-fascist Christian democratic resistance movement. Let it become the day to honour the memory of Belarusian Jews, an integral and valuable part of our nation who had fallen victims to Nazi genocide and the survivors of whom were later forced by the Bolsheviks to emigrate. Let it be the commemoration day for all those who have not lived to see the end of that catastrophe.

There is no Victory we should be celebrating this day. *De-facto* that had been the victory of one Belarusian enemy against another, liberation from Nazi occupation by the Bolshevik occupants. A paradox, but Belarus is perhaps the only country generally seen as "winner" which has lost territories after the war was finished. Belarus simply had no chance in the war, where enemies had been standing on both sides of the frontline.

Still, there is something to celebrate. We can celebrate that the war had finally come to an end, and that the peace was established — even under another occupation. Cities were no longer burning and useless butchery was no longer the agenda. While there is life — there is hope. We have lived through 70 years of Soviet occupation — and we will live through the 10, 15, even 20 years of stupid post-Communist dictatorship. While we are alive — we shall fight:

the fathers had been fighting against much deadlier evil. Victory of life over death – maybe this is the real meaning of the "Victory Day"? Our Dzien pieramohi?

Source: TOL Blogs, May 10, 2007

Belarus Goes Fullprice

Belarus risks becoming the only European country which has no student discounts for local and intercity transportation, as the mostly decorative Parliament adopts the new law.

In accordance with the new Bill which is still to pass confirmation procedure in the Senate and to be signed by President (although no one doubts that it will happen), students lose discounts for travelling around the country. Veterans of war and emergency workers who have taken part in extinguishing the Charnobyl catastrophe will lose public transportation discounts as well. In addition, there will be no free medication for them. Literally, it should be read like follows: people who lost health in the World War 2 and had to extinguish the Charnobyl catastrophe consequences without knowing what had happened there and now survive on miserable welfares, will have to pay full price to this state.

Natalla Piatkievich, deputy president administration Chief, and Radzkou, Minister for Education, have told the public that there is no such precedent as student discounts anywhere in the world. This either is unawareness which make these political prostitutes not matching their official positions, or conscious lies to the people who had never been outside the country. Although Internet is damn expensive in Belarus, unification of homenets in the capital city of Miensk and creation of local news and radio servers traffic that is not billed by providers make access to news possible and free for those who know where to search. Students travel to Poland and Lithuania at least once a month and they know what the situation is there - at least.

Student protests have not been that successful - and official opposition media have mostly failed to deliver appropriate reports from them. An action on the 20th of May has gathered around 250 people, whereas an action on the 23rd of May has failed, with only 20 people. However, the first action must be considered a success - never before people used to gather without coordination by opposition bosses. Resistance starts growing from grassroots. But is still has a long way to go.

Source: TOL Belarus, May 24, 2007

The Faraway Graduation

By Iryna Askirka

Cheerful music, the atmosphere of a holiday, and happy voices — that's what I've heard and felt while having a telephone conversation with my former classmates. The students of the Belarus State Economic University had successfully defended their diplomas and were having a graduation party.

What does a young professional encounter, leaving the threshold of his university, inspired to build his bright future?

The first important problem is the search for a workplace. Those students that were lucky to get scholarships from the Belarus government should be provided with a workplace under the law. Even before a student receives his diploma, the university should make sure that its graduate is provided with a workplace. But there is a problem: where would you find jobs for 3500 economists, which annually graduate from Belarusian universities? And here "agro towns" come to help. That's definitely what the young professional who spent 3 years in college and 4 years in university has been dreaming of. So many days spent in library studying management, economy, international law - just to settle down in rural area, receive a small house from the state (I wish I had a picture of this "house" with cardboard walls to show you), and don't forget a cow. Rural landscapes, and for entertainment - TV at home, and a rural club nearby.

But there are students who were lucky to stay in the capital. I am asking my friends, which workplaces were you given? Tax inspection services, they answer. Sounds solid... Switching to the next question: "What about the starting salary?" 50-170 dollars, they answer. So, you will think, 50-170 dollars an hour for a young professional is not bad at all. But, alas, it's not per hour, it's per month... According to the official Belarusian statistics, the average Belarusian in 2006 was making about 170 dollars a month, of which 140 were spent, 22 dollars represented taxes, and 8 dollars went to the savings account. It's said that we should live according to our income and strive for more.

The second most important question for young specialists is a place to live. Analyzing the secondary market of real estate in Minsk in 2006, prices per square meter have gone up on average 25%. It costs about 55,000 dollars to buy a studio apartment in a bedroom community of Minsk. In the civilized world the question is solved by means of credit. The average interest rate in the Republic of Belarus is 20%, not considering payments associated with credit servicing that at times can increase the rate to 50%. And it takes at least two weeks to gather all the documents necessary to start the process.

It turns out that, after graduation from the university, parents' concern about their children's future just begins. To help find work, to provide with a place to live, to help grandchildren grow up.

The person is ready to work, apply the gained knowledge, and work for his future. Could he start a business? Unfortunately, more and more businessmen are shutting down their businesses, complaining of high tax rates and a toughening of requirements from the state.

According to reports, the national economy is developing, and gross national product keeps on growing; but only our government is quiet for some reason about the fact that all manufactured products go to warehouses, not being able to compete based on price and value in the international market, and exported raw materials are exposed to dumping sanctions.

In addition, the fixed capital of the country is 80% worn out. The equipment needs to be replaced. Yes, the country prepares skilled engineers, programmers, and economists. The problem is that the youth doesn't see any opportunities in today's Belarus.

The world opens up borders for foreign investors, creating all conditions for their work. And what does our government do at the same time? All investments in the country are presented by foreign credits, which for the most part are utilized to pay off past debts. And it's not a secret that many investors are afraid to invest their money into Belarus; in fact, today even lawyers and economists with 15 years of professional experience have a hard time understanding constantly changing tax legislation.

The president is afraid— afraid that someone suddenly will come and "seize our land, destroy traditions, culture." It is strange to listen to such speeches in the 21st century, especially from the "first person" of the country, Alexander Lukashenka. The culture was created over the centuries and whether we will keep our traditions depends only on people; not on whoever represents authority. He is afraid to lose his authority and power.

And nation lives, says "Thank You" to God and President that there is no war. However, citizens spend their summer vacation not at the best resorts and beaches, but at their own summer residences, growing potatoes and beets. And, it is difficult to say when this nation will understand that it's already time for the country in the center of the Europe to open up its borders for economic cooperation with the world, and not just count on "elder brother" Russia.

That's why more often in the streets and squares you will see youth as the main opposition force ready and striving to change something, believing in happy future. They see weaknesses in today's political system. They communicate with the world by means of modern communication technologies and know that they can live differently, freely and happily. They know that they could speak freely about their views, not being afraid that tomorrow they could be dismissed from their university or fired from their workplace.

ECONOMY

Gazprom Taking Over The Pipelines in Belarus

By Vladimir Socor

On May 18 in Minsk, Russia's Gazprom and the Belarus government's State Property Committee signed agreements to turn the Belarus state-owned gas pipeline company Beltransgaz into a Russia-Belarus joint company. Betransgaz handles both the transit of Russian gas to European Union countries and the internal distribution of Russian gas in Belarus.

Under the sale-and-purchase agreement, Gazprom shall acquire a 50% stake in Beltransgaz in four stages, beginning immediately and due to be completed by March 2010. Meanwhile, the Beltransgaz board of directors is to be replaced by July 2007 with a new board to include Gazprom's representatives. The agreement rules out the possibility of Belarus issuing a "golden share" that would give Minsk a veto. At Moscow's insistence, President Alexander Lukashenka concurrently signed a decree forfeiting that right on behalf of Belarus.

The sides agreed to assess the value of Beltransgaz at $5 billion. Gazprom shall pay $2.5 billion for the 50% stake in four installments of $625 million each: the first by June 1, 2007, then by February 1 of each year in 2008, 2009, and 2010. With each payment, Gazprom will be acquiring a 12.5% stake in Beltransgaz, completing the 50% takeover by March 1, 2010. For a small silver lining from Minsk's standpoint, any disputed issues are to be resolved in Belarusian courts.

Further under the agreement, Beltransgaz shall add a commercial surcharge to its wholesale deliveries to gas consumers in Belarus (municipal utilities, industrial enterprises, and local distribution networks). Gazprom insisted on this surcharge in order to increase its profits from the joint company at the expense of Belarus consumers.

The May 18 agreement executes the terms of the December 31, 2006, protocol with Gazprom, which Belarus signed under the Kremlin's duress. Moscow threatened to charge $140, then $200 per 1,000 cubic meters of Russian gas in 2007, which would have more than quadrupled at one stroke the then-existing "fraternal" price of $46.68 per 1,000 cubic meters. Belarus was forced to sign off a 50% stake in Beltransgaz as compensation for a gradual, instead of sudden, price hike on Russian gas. At each step of the price escalation and then de-escalation, Gazprom portrayed its price as "market-determined."

That protocol stipulated the creation of a joint Russia-Belarus gas transport organization on the basis of Beltransgaz. It gave Belarus until June 1, 2007, to start handing over the 50% stake of Beltransgaz in four annual tranches.

Under the December 31, 2006 protocol, Belarus is paying $100 per 1,000 cubic meters of Russian gas in 2007, supposedly amounting to some 40% of the "average" price

charged by Gazprom to its European customers. The protocol stipulates that Belarus shall pay 67% of the "European price" in 2008, 80% in 2009, 90% by 2010, and 100% by 2011. The actual price shall be adjusted annually according to a "formula" that would factor in the sale prices of Russian gas in Europe, overall market trends, and the price of the "oil products basket" at the moment of signing the annual delivery contracts. The "formula" seems vague enough to allow ample scope for price manipulation and political leverage.

Russia has contracted for transiting a huge 46.7 billion cubic meters of gas to European Union countries via Belarus in 2007. Of that amount, 30 billion are to flow through the Yamal-Europe pipeline, the Belarus stretch of which is Russian-owned. Another 15.7 billion cubic meters is to flow through the Beltransgaz transit pipeline, which now passes from Belarus into joint Belarus-Russian ownership. The annual transit volumes through the Yamal-Europe line are incrementally mounting as that line reaches its design capacity of 33 billion cubic meters. Conversely, the annual volumes handled by the Beltransgaz transit pipeline to Europe are gradually declining from the 20-billion-cubic-meter level of previous years.

Belarus receives a transit fee of only $1.45 per 1,000 cubic meters of Russian gas per 100 kilometers of pipeline in Belarus in 2007. While very low by European standards, it almost doubles the $0.75 transit fee that was in effect for some years (coupled with the deeply discounted price of Russian gas for Belarus) until the end of 2006. Meanwhile, the transit service for Russian gas through the Yamal-Europe pipeline apparently remains constant at a mere $0.46 per 1,000 cubic meters per 100 kilometers. Minsk wanted this fee slightly raised in order for the increment to accrue to Belarus.

Gazprom is delivering almost 22 billion cubic meters of gas for internal consumption in Belarus in 2007, amply covering the country's requirements (as well as its inefficiency and waste of energy). The annual delivery volume has slightly steadily increased each year (it was some 21 billion cubic meters in 2006).

The economy of Belarus will not easily adjust to the price hikes. Gazprom's sharing in Beltransgaz's revenue may force the latter into deficits, setting the stage for further inroads by Gazprom. The European Union's energy security has suffered a fresh setback with the passage of yet another transit avenue under Kremlin control

Source: Jamestown Foundation, Eurasia Daily Monitor, May 21, 2007

QUOTES of QUARTER

"We are speaking about the competitive market economy, which cannot exist in the sphere of incomprehensible preferences and subsidies. Both Russia and Belarus will gradually adopt world prices and free tariffs. "

ALEXANDER SURIKOV, Russia's ambassador to Belarus, during a press conference on Russian Independence day.

Is The Well Starting To Run Dry?

Since the "Gas War" at the end of 2006, Belarusian and foreign economists have been speculating about the impact of the loss of cheap Russian energy on the country and its regime. While it is difficult to get trustworthy official data in a dictatorship, there do seem to be some indications that the effects are beginning to be felt.

To make it clear from the start, I am not an economist. This piece is more in the style of the pre-1991 "science" of Kremlinology—an attempt to "read between the lines," utilize small tidbits of news, and use other indirect signs to understand what is happening to Lukashenka's "economic miracle." What comes is an attempt to gather together some reports from the Belarusian media which, when examined together, appear to indicate that Belarus' "market socialism" is in for a bumpy ride. The following news items appeared during the first three weeks of March and offer a purely impressionistic view. I hope this will be the first of a series of pieces that will give some hints on what is happening as the economy adjusts to much higher energy costs.

• January 2007 profits of fuel industry products declined more than nine times in comparison to a year ago. The fuel industry has gone from being the most profitable to least profitable component in the industrial sector. Fuel output is down and refinery output of gasoline, diesel, and fuel oil has decreased from last year's levels at this time. Fifty percent of enterprises operating at a loss are fuel-related, compared to 22 percent a year ago at this time.

• The finance minister declared that increased prices for imported energy will cost the Belarus government about $6 billion.

• The Interior Ministry has complained about an increase in poor-quality fuel supplies to state-run enterprises.

• Authorities are planning to loan 150 billion rubles to local governments for the purchase of fuel and lubricating oils for the spring harvesting campaign. This year the government cannot provide collective farms with free fuel, as it did in 2006.

• Rather than doubling supplies as previously planned, Lukoil has stopped processing its crude oil at Belarusian refineries on a "give and take" basis because "this is unprofitable." Slavnaft is also considering stopping this type of business.

• Lukashenko reversed his decision to reduce the rate of excise tax on automotive fuel by 2.5 times and actually increased the rate 2.4 times.

• A deputy minister of industry indicated that increased energy prices will reduce the profitability of Belarus' automobile industry by two or three percentage points.

• The Finance Minister indicated that Belarus is seeking a $1.5 billion stabilization loan from Russia to plug holes in the budget caused by a sharp rise in energy costs. Another loan is being negotiated with China in case "other lines of credit don't work out."

•Beginning in March, motorists exiting Belarus more than once in three days must declare the amount of fuel in their vehicle's tanks. This is designed to prevent those living along the border from selling cheaper Belarusian diesel fuel in Poland.

•The National Assembly is considering several new laws designed to promote energy security, including promoting energy saving and the use of renewable energy sources.

•Schools and kindergartens across the country have been ordered to reduce electricity and heat consumption by 10 to 15 percent, or face fines.

•Belarus's Council of Ministers has reduced the export surplus target for the Belarusian State Petrochemical Concern (Belnaftakhim) from $5.03 billion to $4.1 billion.

•Belarus is negotiating with Venezuela, Kazakhstan and Ukraine to diversify its sources of imported energy supplies.

This news focuses only on the energy sector. It should be read in conjunction with other, non-energy related economic news, which also does not bode well for the Lukashenka regime, such as real average pay being down 9 percent in January, tax arrears and inflation up, and a new trade deficit. At least this rocky situation is being balanced by the good news that the production of alcoholic beverages is up.

Full of Gas
Source: The Latest from TOL Belarus, posted 23 March 2007

Oil, Potassium, Vodka, GSM

Belarusian tax authorities have announced the main sources of state tax income for 2006. About 28% of tax income depends on just 15 enterprises - most of them state-owned and related to oil refining business. I wonder where all the industrial giants of our republic, the pride of the working people are — MAZ, MTZ, Horizont, all of them? I guess it says a lot about the parasite nature of Belarusian economy: there has never been a better time for making friends with Russian oil moguls of Lukoil and Slavneft.

Here are the glorious 15 who feed Belarusian retirees, veterans and the Presidential Administration:

"Naftan" (Novapolack oil refinery),
Mazyr oil refinery,
Univest-M
Beltransgaz,
Minskenergo, Vitebskenergo, Homelenergo (regional energy distribution networks),
Belorusneft (the Belarusian state oil company),
Belaruskaliy (the Belarussian potassium producer)
Lukoil-Belorussiya (Belarusian division of Russian Lukoil),
Minsk-Kristall (Belarus' largest spirits distillery),
Slavneft-Start,
Velkom (cellular operator),
Belarusian Metallurgical plan,
Slavneftehim (oil refinery).

Source: TOL Belarus, May 28, 2007

Culture & Society

Days of Swedish Culture in Belarus

took place in Minsk , Horadnia and Pinsk in the months of May and June 2007.



The events were sponsored by the Minsk branch of the Swedish embassy in Moscow.

On May 17 the Stockholm-based Belarusian historian Andrej Kotljarchuk presented in Minsk the second edition of his book "Swedes in the history and culture of Belarusians." An introductory address was delivered by the Swedish consul in Belarus, Mr. Stefan Ericsson, in Belarusian. Mr. Ericsson pointed out that the common historical heritage of Belarus and Sweden makes the events of this type quite logical.

On May 24, also in Minsk, there was a presentation of a Swedish children's book "Jonathan from the Mountain of Birds" by its author, Yents Albom.

Between May 30 and June 2 Literary and Musical days were staged in Minsk, Horadnia and Pinsk.

Finally, a festival of contemporary Swedish films took place in Minsk on June 7 through 10. Both Sewedish and Belarusian documentary and art films were shown. The public had the opportunity to meet the film producer Zmicier Plaks from Stockholm, and the Belarusian film director Halina Adamovich, who was recently awarded in Krakow, Poland the "Golden Dragon" prize for the best documentary film.

An International Festival of Bagpipes

took place in Minsk on April 22, 2007. It attracted close to 40 Belarusian musical groups, specializing in bagpipe music. Groups from many European countries also participated — from Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Galicia (a region of Spain), Germany and Scotland.



Bagpipes - by Stary Olsa

Zmicier Sasnouski, representing the Belarusian band "Stary Olsa," remarked that annual bagpipe festivals in Belarus "are becoming a tradition; the ancient Belarusian musical instrument has returned."

Source: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty.

NEWS BRIEFS

The source of items in the NEWS BRIEFS section is the RFE/RL Newsline, unless otherwise indicated.

1. POLITICAL OPPOSITION

March 26, 2007

BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION STAGES 'FREEDOM DAY' RALLY AMID HEAVY SECURITY...

Some 10,000 people turned up for an opposition-staged rally in Minsk on March 25, RFE/RL's Belarus Service reported. The rally was intended to mark the anniversary of short-lived Belarusian People's Republic of 1918, the first independent Belarusian state, which was crushed by the Bolsheviks. Police forces, who were present on the streets in huge numbers, prevented demonstrators from gathering on October Square in downtown Minsk and redirected the march in three separate columns to the Academy of Sciences, where participants were addressed by former opposition presidential candidate Alyaksandr Milinkevich. Police scuffled with demonstrators, but no injuries or arrests were reported. Several dozen people were reportedly detained while coming to the rally and released after it ended. More than 30 opposition activists were arrested and/or jailed in Belarus last week in what was widely seen as a preventive measure before the March 25 demonstration.

March 26, 2007

...AS EU POLITICIANS EXPRESS SUPPORT FOR BELARUSIAN DEMOCRATS

German Chancellor Angela Merkel, who presided over celebrations in Berlin on March 25 to mark the 50th anniversary of the creation of the EU, said the Minsk rally was a"source of immense hope for those in Europe who still endure oppression— like the people of Belarus," international news agencies reported. European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso said in Berlin the same day that the European Union is ready to form"a full partnership" with Belarus and boost financial aid to the country if it adopts democratic reforms. European Parliament Deputy Chairman Janusz Onyszkiewicz attended the March 25 rally in Minsk."There is a dictatorship in Belarus.... There cannot be a country in the center of Europe without democracy," Onyszkiewicz told the crowd.

March 29, 2007

BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION ACTIVIST ACCUSES DOCTORS OF FORCING HER INTO MENTAL HOSPITAL



Krystsina Shatsikava

Opposition activist Krystsina Shatsikava has complained to the Mahilyou City Prosecutor's Office and the Mahilyou Regional Executive Committee over her kidnap-style detention, Belapan reported on March 28. On March 23, two days before a large opposition rally in Minsk, following her interrogation by KGB officers, Shatsikava was forced into a car in downtown Mahilyou and taken to a mental hospital where she was held until March 26. Her whereabouts were officially confirmed on March 25. Shatsikava told a news conference on March 28 that she is prepared to bring the medical staff of the mental hospital in Mahilyou to account over her detention. Shatsikava's mother, Svyatlana Shatsikava, spoke at the same news conference: "I will do everything possible to prevent these people from working as doctors. Why did not they tell me where my daughter was? Why did not they allow me to talk to her? Such actions do not come as a surprise when committed by police, but they are unacceptable for doctors." Human rights defender Valyantsin Stefanovich said Krystsina Shatsikava should go to court over the incident. "Under regulations [in force], a person may be put in a mental hospital under two conditions only— if the person is under permanent medical observation or if he or she behaves aggressively. But in any case, this must be reported to relatives, which was not done," Stefanovich added.

April 5, 2007

TWO BELARUSIAN OPPOSITIONISTS GET OFF LIGHTLY

Opposition activist Vyachaslau Siuchyk was found guilty of "petty hooliganism" by a district court in Minsk on April 4, but the judge imposed no penalties on him, saying his offense was insignificant, Belapan reported. The police officers who detained Siuchyk on March 13 initially said they did so because he resembled a suspect in a criminal case, but later changed their minds and accused him of urinating in a public place). "These police officers are to be pitied. They were told to lie and policemen accustomed to lying during the present regime will become a big problem for society when the regime falls," Siuchyk said after the verdict. Earlier the same day, the same court found Belarusian Popular Front leader Vintsuk Vyachorka guilty of using obscene language in a public place but also released him, saying the offense was insignificant. The two verdicts may signal a change of tactics for Belarusian judges, who last month punished dozens of opposition activists with short jail terms on charges of obscene public behavior.

April 12, 2007

BELARUSIAN AUTHORITIES RELEASE OPPOSITIONIST ON BAIL

Belarusian authorities released United Civic Party activist Dzyanis Dzyanisau on bail on April 11 from a detention center in Vitsyebsk, Belapan reported, quoting Andrey Kim of the Belarusian Helsinki Committee (BHC). Bail was 15,500,000 rubles ($7,260). Kim said that the family and friends of Dzyanisau collected the bail money over the course of three weeks and paid it on April 9. Dzyanisau, who played an active part in a three-day protest against Alyaksandr Lukashenka's reelection as president in March 2006, was arrested in Homyel on February 16 on a charge of attempting to organize mass riots. The charge is believed to stem from Dzyanisau's arrest in Vitsyebsk last summer, when police detained him for passing out leaflets titled "Bunt" (Rebellion) during an open-air concert. Kim said that BHC is demanding that the charge against Dzyanisau be dropped on the grounds that it is unfounded and politically motivated.

April 27, 2007

BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION MARKS CHORNOBYL ANNIVERSARY

Several thousand people took part in the Chornobyl Way march organized by the opposition in Minsk on April 26 to commemorate the 21st anniversary of the explosion at the Chornobyl nuclear power plant, Belapan and RFE/RL's Belarus Service re-

ported. Participants included opposition leaders Vintsuk Vyachorka, Anatol Lyabedzka, and Syarhey Kalyakin. Former opposition presidential candidate Alyaksandr Milinkevich did not join the march, reportedly objecting to the fact that demonstrators marched along the route imposed by the city administration and not along the one they originally planned. Some 20 young people were reportedly beaten and detained by riot police after the march ended. They were subsequently released after being fingerprinted. Meanwhile, President Alyaksandr Lukashanka, who on April 26 was touring Chornobyl-affected regions in eastern Belarus, said the government will spend $1.5 billion on its Chornobyl relief programs from 2007-10.

April 30, 2007

BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION HOLDS REGIONAL FORUMS BEFORE NATIONWIDE CONGRESS

Opposition groups on April 29 held regional conferences in Minsk Oblast and Homel Oblast to select candidates for the Second Congrees of Pro-democratic Forces, which was preliminarily scheduled in Minsk for May 26-27, RFE/RL's Belarus Service reported. Participants in the regional conferences took part in a secret ballot to determine the status of chairperson and co-chairpersons of the Political Council of the United Democratic Forces, the formation of the Political Council and its board, and the functions and powers of the board. The key question for the nationwide congress of the opposition in May will be whether Alyaksandr Milinkevich, who was elected as the opposition's presidential candidate for the March 2006 election at a similar opposition congress in October 2005, will remain the leader of the united opposition or have to share his leadership with other opposition party leaders under a "rotational principle" proposed earlier this year..

May 7, 2007

BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION LEADER FINED FOR UNSANCTIONED MARCH

A district court in Minsk on May 4 found Anatol Lyaukovich, acting chairman of the opposition Belarusian Social Democratic Party (Hramada), guilty of participation in an unauthorized march on May 1, Belapan reported. The court imposed a fine of 620,000 rubles ($290). According to the court, the opposition was authorized to hold a Labor Day rally in People's Friendship Park in Minsk, but the march to the park was held without permission.

May 7, 2007

BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION LEADER MEETS WITH POLISH PRESIDENT

Alyaksandr Milinkevich, chairman of the Belarusian opposition's Political Council of Pro-democratic Forces, met with Polish President Lech Kaczynski in Warsaw on May 4, Belapan reported. "We discussed the role that Poland could play in the democratization of Belarus... I emphasized the need for the Polish ambassador to return to Belarus, as, in my opinion, this would improve our bilateral relations" Milinkevich said after the meeting. Henryk Litwin, who was appointed Poland's ambassador to Belarus in February 2006, has not yet taken up his duties because of strained diplomatic relations between the two countries. Kaczynski reportedly assured to Milinkevich that Poland will continue its programs providing assistance to Belarusian students expelled from universities and Belarusians expelled from jobs for political reasons.

May 17, 2007

BELARUSIANS PROTEST CONVERSION OF MONASTERY IN MINSK

Several hundred people gathered in front of the 17th-century Bernardine monastery complex in Minsk on May 16 to protest planned reconstruction work to convert the monastery into a hotel, Belapan reported. The baroque-style complex, located near Belarus' main Orthodox cathedral, includes a former monastery and a former Roman Catholic church, which currently houses state archives. The protest coincided with Solidarity Day, which has been observed by the Belarusian democratic opposition on the 16th day of every month since September 16, 2005, with the intention of expressing solidarity with the families of missing politicians and political prisoners in Belarus.

May 21, 2007

FORMER BELARUSIAN PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE HEADS OPPOSITION MOVEMENT

Some 100 delegates from across Belarus participated on May 20 in the founding congress of the Movement for Freedom (Rukh za Svabodu), initially conceived by united opposition presidential candidate Alyaksandr Milinkevich in March 2006, shortly after the presidential election, Belapan and RFE/RL's Belarus Service reported. The congress took place in the building hosting the Polish consulate and the Union of Poles in Belarus in the northwestern town of Hrodna. The delegates reportedly elected Milinkevich as the leader of the movement and managed to complete all formalities needed for the movement's legal registration before police officers forced their way into the building and evacuated all participants, due to an alleged bomb threat.

May 29, 2007

BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION COALITION DEMOTES FORMER PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE

Some 600 delegates to the opposition congress held in Minsk on May 26-27 decided to replace former presidential candidate Alyaksandr Milinkevich, who led the Political Council of United Pro-democratic Forces, with four co-leaders, RFE/RL's Belarus Service and Belapan reported. Now the council is chaired by United Civic Party leader Anatol Lyabedzka, Belarusian Popular Front leader Vintsuk Vyachorka, Belarusian Communist Party leader Syarhey Kalyakin, and Social Democratic Party (Hramada) acting head Anatol Lyaukovich. Milinkevich, too, was offered a position of co-chairman but he declined it, saying he will concentrate on developing his For Freedom movement. The congress also adopted a "strategy of action" envisaging a "constructive dialogue with the authorities." An alternative strategy proposed by advocates of street demonstrations and civil-disobedience actions was not put to a vote. "The fight for power in the country has been replaced by a fight for power among the opposition," Milinkevich commented on the course of action adopted by the congress. "The simulation of activity will not be met with support from the public," he added.

May 31, 2007

BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION COUNCIL DISTRIBUTES RESPONSIBILITIES AMONG CO-CHAIRS

The Political Council of Pro-Democratic Forces on May 30 assigned an area of responsibility to each of its four co-chairmen, who were elected at the opposition congress on May 26-27, Belapan reported. Belarusian Popular Front leader Vintsuk Vyachorka will be responsible for information and mobilization work

as well as foreign relations; Anatol Lyabedzka, chairman of the United Civic Party, for "the development of a positive alternative"; Syarhey Kalyakin, leader of the Belarusian Party of Communists, for working with the provinces; and Anatol Lyaukovich, acting chairman of the Belarusian Social Democratic Party (Hramada), for election campaigns.

June 6, 2007
BELARUSIAN OPPOSITIONIST PROPOSES PRO-EU ALLIANCE

Opposition politician Mikalay Statkevich, who was recently released from prison, wants to set up a pro-European alliance of opposition activists that would be led by former opposition presidential candidate Alyaksandr Milinkevich, Belapan reported on June 5. "All sociological surveys suggest that the population of Belarus does not have an allergy to the European Union," Statkevich told the agency. "As for young and middle-aged people, they raise two hands in support of European values. This is the army that we can gather. For them, the flag of the EU is very important and of greater value than ideas about unity with Russia," he added. Statkevich noted that the new alliance would unite people behind a pro-European platform, rather than behind a specific leader. At last month's opposition congress in Minsk, Milinkevich was voted out of his role as leader of the coalition of opposition forces. The congress decided to replace Milinkevich with four co-chairs of the Political Council of United Prodemocratic Forces. Milinkevich has not yet commented on Statkevich's proposal.

June 8, 2007
BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION SCHEDULES MASS DEMONSTRATION IN OCTOBER

Viktar Ivashkevich, deputy chairman of the Belarusian Popular Front (BNF), said on June 7 that Belarusian opposition forces intend to organize at least 20,000 participants in late October for an event in Minsk called the European March for Freedom, Belapan reported. "We plan to organize a large-scale preparatory campaign, which will include information campaigns for the public, sociological surveys, and round-table conferences. Apart from this, we plan to stage a rally and a concert on July 27, Belarus' Independence Day. This will also be one of the stages of preparations for the European March" Ivashkevich said. Opposition activists also plan to attend mass events on July 3, Belarus's officially recognized Independence Day, to promote the European Union's new strategy toward Belarus. "We seek to ensure that at least half of the population of large Belarusian cities are aware of the EU's conditions and support them. And the [intended] result will be the implementation by Belarus of at least some of the EU's 12 conditions, if not all," Ivashkevich added

June 14, 2007
BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION CONFERS IN LITHUANIA

Nearly 100 representatives of Belarusian opposition parties and nongovernmental organizations gathered for a two-day conference in Vilnius, Lithuania, on June 13, RFE/RL's Belarus Service and Belapan reported. United Civic Party leader Anatol Lyabedzka told journalists that the main objective of the conference is to draft an action plan based on the guidelines of the opposition congress in Minsk last month . Lyabedzka also explained why the congress is taking place in Lithuania, not Belarus. "We are holding it in Vilnius because the city is close to Belarus. Participants need the same amount of money to travel to it that they would need to go to Vitsebsk or Mahilyou. But in Vilnius we are guaranteed that 30 minutes into the conference no police or emergency-management officers will break into the auditorium, saying that a bomb has been planted there. No one can guarantee this in Belarus" he noted. Belarusian Popular Front leader Vintsuk Vyachorka told RFE/RL that participants in the conference resolved that the opposition will take an active part in parliamentary elections in Belarus in 2008

June 19, 2007
FORMER BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE APPLIES FOR REGISTRATION OF MOVEMENT

Alyaksandr Milinkevich has filed a request with the Justice Ministry to register the Movement for Freedom, Belapan reported on June 18. "We have set five priorities for our activities, including the protection of human rights, the building of civil society, the protection of independence and sovereignty, free and democratic elections, and the pro-European development of our society," Milinkevich's press office quoted him as saying. Milinkevich also argued that the ministry's decision on the movement's registration will indicate whether the Belarusian government has turned toward democratization. "The situation regarding freedom of association has considerably deteriorated lately," he said. "More than 200 nongovernmental organizations have been liquidated in the last three years. Not a single NGO has been registered unless it is directly or indirectly connected with the government." Milinkevich advocated forming a broad popular movement for freedom shortly after Belarus's March 2006 presidential election, in which he unsuccessfully challenged President Alyaksandr Lukashenka. The founding conference for the Movement for Freedom took place in Hrodna on May 20 this year. Later that month, Milinkevich resigned from the participation in the Political Council of Pro-Democratic Forces, which is an umbrella organization for major opposition parties in Belarus.

June 20, 2007
OPPOSITION LEADERS CRITICIZE UN DECISION TO SCRAP SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR FOR BELARUS

Alyaksandr Milinkevich, former presidential candidate of the united opposition, told Belapan on June 19 that the recent UN Human Rights Council decision to eliminate the mandate of a rapporteur on human rights for Belarus "ultimately undermines" the reputation of the UN. "The council's decision is a severe blow to the struggle for ensuring respect for human rights that prodemocratic forces are conducting here," Milinkevich said. "This decision will now be used by the Belarusian authorities for propaganda purposes. The council has turned into a helpless body incapable of efficiently monitoring the human rights situation in problem countries." Vintsuk Vyachorka, chairman of the Belarusian Popular Front, commented that if undemocratic and dictatorial regimes coordinate their efforts, they will be able to dictate their will to the United Nations. According to Vyachorka, Belarus's democratic forces should pin their hopes regarding the human-rights situation in Belarus on the EU and the United States rather than on the UN. "I believe that if EU countries and the U.S. announced their nonparticipation in the present [UN Human Rights] Council, this would completely discredit this institution, and it would make no sense for us to appeal to the council, as the human-rights situation in Belarus would be considered by representatives of nations that have similar or even worse human-rights records," Vyachorka noted. .

2. REGIME ACTIONS and STATEMENTS

April 13, 2007

BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT PLEDGES NOT TO SURRENDER SOVEREIGNTY...

Alyaksandr Lukashenka said at an April 12 meeting with top media executives in Minsk that Belarus will not become a province of the Russian Federation nor of any other country, Belapan reported. Lukashenka admitted that even opposition newspapers no longer write that he is "a traitor, surrenders our country's sovereignty and independence" Lukashenka added that "sovereignty and independence are more valuable" than the favorable price of Russian natural gas. Lukashenka affirmed the importance of a union with Russia, but also did not hide his resentment at Russia's decision to "switch to market economy relations." "How can you build good, human, brotherly relations, when they have bled you dry under the guise of the establishment of market relations? How could I respond to this and what relations could I build with Russia?" Lukashenka asked rhetorically.

...REJECTS PRECONDITIONS FOR CLOSER DIALOGUE WITH EU...

President Lukashenka said on April 12 that Belarus will not tolerate dictation and pressure exerted by the EU, Belapan reported. "The EU sets us a list of conditions that the so-called Belarusian opposition writes for it," Lukashenka said, adding that "this is not a normal basis for dialogue" "If we detained some people," Lukashenka said, commenting on the EU's dissatisfaction with the Belarusian authorities' treatment of demonstrators on March 25, "those were provocateurs who worked for money. There were one and a half thousand slobs and some 400 rebels [participating in the demonstration]" Lukashenka said that the authorities will not let those people "foul our streets." Lukashenka announced that Belarus is ready for the dialogue with the EU, but "if you want to take us by the scruff of the neck like a naughty kitten, then don't bother us." Lukashenka admitted that Belarus 'foreign policy is "multivectoral," but the country has not managed to establish the same relations with the West as with Russia and Ukraine.

...AND DENIES INTENTION TO MAKE ELDER SON HIS SUCCESSOR

President Lukashenka said on April 12 that he does not intend to appoint his elder son Viktar as his successor, Belapan reported. "I swear on my children's fate that we have never discussed this issue at home," Lukashenka said, adding that he himself will be president of Belarus "in the near, visible future." "Viktar is weaker today and will be weaker tomorrow than the incumbent president," Lukashenka said."Why should I prepare the presidency for [someone] who is weaker? I will be preparing the smallest one for becoming my successor. Neither the first nor the second one will be president. Maybe the third one will be," he added. Lukashenka is known to have two legitimate sons — Viktar and Dzmitry — and so his comment is likely to fuel rumors about his having a third, illegitimate son.

April 19, 2007

BELARUSIAN EDUCATION MINISTER OPPOSES EUROPEAN CENTERS

Education Minister Alyaksandr Radzkou said on April 18 that there is no need for "European information centers on human rights and democracy" at schools of higher learning in Belarus, Belapan reported. Radzkou was responding to a proposal by opposition politician Alyaksandr Milinkevich, who suggested earlier this week in Strasbourg that "Belarusian young people should have the opportunity to obtain firsthand knowledge about Europe and Europeans, human rights, and democracy." Milinkevich's project, "Democracy, education and Europe in Belarus," would provide for the establishment of such centers at all schools of higher learning in Belarus. Their activities would be coordinated by representatives of the Council of Europe or the EU. "We have a special course — even at school we study this subject in the framework of the 'Man, Society, State' course," Radzkou said. "We believe that this is enough at the current stage," he added.

April 25, 2007

BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT EMPHASIZES INDEPENDENCE IN INTEGRATION WITH RUSSIA...

President Alyaksandr Lukashenka on April 24 delivered his annual address to the National Assembly, which consists of the Chamber of Representatives and the Council of the Republic, Belarusian Television reported. He said that despite the conflict with Moscow earlier this year over gas- and oil-price hikes, there is no alternative to his policy of integration with Russia. At the same time, Lukashenka stressed that maintaining Belarus's independence will remain a key priority in this integration policy. Referring to Belarus' relations with the European Union and the United States, Lukashenka underscored that they should be based on equality. "We are not standing [before the EU and the U.S.] with a begging hand" Lukashenka said.

...AND STRESSES IMPORTANCE OF DIVERSIFICATION OF OIL SUPPLIES

President Lukashenka said in his annual address to the National Assembly on April 24 that, in order to minimize the likelihood of further such energy crises, the Belarusian government has looked for possibilities to develop oil fields and/or import oil from such countries as Venezuela, Iran, and Azerbaijan, Belarusian Television reported."The economy cannot be dependent only on one supplier of hydrocarbons. We have good relations with Venezuela, Iran, Azerbaijan. It is important for us to extract oil in these countries" Lukashenka said, adding that prospects for such extraction are auspicious. The Belarusian president also assured lawmakers that Belarus will build a nuclear power plant to ensure its economic security.

April 25, 2007

BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT IDENTIFIES PARTNERS IN 'MULTIFACETED' FOREIGN POLICY

President Alyaksandr Lukashenka said in his annual address to the National Assembly on April 24 that Belarus will pursue a "dynamic, multifaceted foreign policy" while not changing its strategic course for integration with Russia, Belarusian Television reported. "Belarus is involved actively in international trade and bilateral relations with many countries, and that has a direct impact on the condition of our domestic markets and the social and economic spheres" he added. Lukashenka said China still remains Belarus' "leading ally" in the international arena. "Bilateral trade turnover [with China] reached almost $1 billion in 2006, but this is far from being the limit.... [And] there's one more reason why our partnership with China is promising for Belarus. In the context of establishing a set of transport corridors between East Asia and Europe, our country is certainly interested in becoming a reliable link of the economic system of Eurasian significance" Lukashenka said. He also stressed the importance

of Belarus' relations with Nonaligned Movement countries."We have, at the highest level, ploughed up half of the states of the Nonaligned Movement.... India, Venezuela, Iran, and Oman are ready to cooperate with us and already cooperate in the form of strategic partnership," Lukashenka noted.

May 23, 2007

BELARUSIAN AUTHORITIES RELEASE TWO POLITICAL PRISONERS...



M. Statkevich

Belarusian courts on May 22 decided to release on parole opposition politician Mikalay Statkevich and opposition youth leader Pavel Sevyarynets, two and three months before their respective prison terms are due to end, Belapan and RFE/RL's Belarus Service reported. Statkevich and Sevyarynets in May 2005 were each sentenced to three years in prison for staging a series of unauthorized demonstrations in Minsk in the fall of 2004 against the official results of the 2004 parliamentary elections and referendum, which are widely believed to have been rigged. The sentences were subsequently reduced by one year under an amnesty law. Both Statkevich and Sevyarynets believe that the authorities decided to release them ahead of schedule in order to curry favor with the EU as it considers the trade benefits Belarus receives under the bloc's Generalized System of Preferences. the EU threatened last year to suspend Belarus' benefits this coming June if Minsk fails to observe trade union rights. The suspension might cost Belarus an estimated 400 million euros (S536 million) per year. "No matter how I tried to persuade the judge and the prosecutor [on May 22] that my trial was illegal, they did not pay any attention" Sevyarynets told RFE/RL. "I made the conclusion that they had simply been ordered to free me. I link this move to the voting on the suspension of [EU trade] preferences for Belarus that is to take place soon. So, my release was a political decision and has no relation whatsoever to either justice or a law-governed state"



P. Sevyarynets

...BUT REFUSED TO FREE A THIRD

Belarus' Supreme Court on May 22 rejected an appeal from former presidential candidate Alyaksandr Kazulin, who was sentenced to 5 1/2 years in prison in 2006 on charges widely believed to be politically motivated. Kazulin, who was arrested during a post-election opposition protest in March 2006, was found guilty of hooliganism and organizing group activities disturbing the public peace. The appeal by Kazulin can only be further examined by the prosecutor general or the chairman of the Supreme Court. Kazulin's release is a key demand by Western groups pressing for reforms in Belarus."Kazulin's release is now linked strictly to a change of political regime in the country. By using Kazulin as an example, the court has given a stiff rebuke to any optimists hoping for some sort of liberalization," Kazulin's lawyer, Ihar Rynkevich, told journalists.

May 2, 2007

BELARUSIAN LEGISLATURE WITHDRAWS SOME SOCIAL BENEFITS

The Chamber of Representatives, Belarus's lower house of parliament, on May 23 almost unanimously passed a government-sponsored bill that abolishes state benefits for certain groups of people, Belapan and RFE/RL's Belarus Service reported. In particular, the bill cancels reduced transportation fares for students, holders of the Veteran of Labor title, and workers who are entitled to reduced fares while on duty. The bill also gives fewer people the right to discounts on utility and phone bills and health services, and reduces the number of people allowed to receive discounted medical services at health resorts. Labor and Social Security Minister Uladzimir Patupchyk told legislators that the bill will help the state save some $170 billion rubles ($80 million) per year. Volha Abramava, the only legislator who voted against the bill, told Belapan that the withdrawal of state benefits should have been carried out as part of broader economic reforms, so that the people affected could understand why they lost their privileges. "A hidden potential for saving budgetary funds could have been found in costly economic sectors instead of the social sphere," Abramava added. To become law, the bill needs to be approved by the upper house — the Council of the Republic — and signed by the president.

May 31, 2007

BELARUSIAN KGB ARRESTS HEAD OF PETROCHEMICAL CONCERN, OTHERS

Belarus' State Security Committee (KGB) on May 29 arrested Alyaksandr Barouski, the chairman of the Belarusian State Petrochemical Industry Concern (Belnaftakhim), on suspicion of corruption, along with several other heads of state-run and private companies, Belarusian media reported on May 30, quoting Prosecutor-General Pyotr Miklashevich. Barouski is reportedly also suspected of abuse of authority. Miklashevich told journalists that large amounts of cash, valuables, and documents related to the investigation were seized from the suspects, who were taken to a KGB pretrial detention center. Barouski, the former director of the Palimir synthetic-fiber factory in Navapolatsk, was appointed chairman of Belnaftakhim in December 2005. The petrochemical company accounts for more than one-fourth of Belarus' exports. KGB spokesman Valery Nadtachayeu told Belapan that the names of people arrested along with Barouski will not be disclosed for the time being, adding that secrecy is in the "interests of the investigation."

June 21, 2007

MINSK WELCOMES UN DECISION TO SCRAP HUMAN RIGHTS RAPPORTEUR FOR BELARUS

Belarusian Foreign Ministry spokesman Andrey Papou said in a statement on June 20 that the UN Human Rights Council's decision on June 18 to eliminate the position of its rapporteur on human-rights observance in Belarus shows the council's ability to be guided "by the principles of a constructive international dialogue and cooperation in the human-rights sphere," Belapan reported. "In our opinion, the decision of the Human Rights Council reflects the natural intention of this new human-rights institution in the UN system to ensure universality, impartiality, and nonselectivity in dealing with issues concerning human rights and to preclude from its work opportunities for politicizing human-rights problems and applying double standards," Papou

added. Meanwhile, U.S. State Department spokesman Sean McCormack said in a written statement on June 19 that Washington is disappointed by the UN Human Rights Council's first year of activities. "The Council focused almost exclusively on a single country -- Israel -- failing to address serious human-rights violations in other countries such as Burma, Zimbabwe, North Korea, Belarus, and Cuba. Unfortunately, today the President of the Council announced a new rules package making these problems even worse, by terminating the mandates of the UN Rapporteurs on the Governments of Cuba and Belarus, two of the world's most active perpetrators of serious human rights violations, and singling out Israel as the only country subject to a permanent agenda item," McCormack noted

3. ECONOMY

March 28, 2007

BELARUS CHOOSES DUTCH BANK TO ADVISE ON CREDIT RATINGS

The Belarusian government has selected the Dutch-based bank ABN AMRO to advise on international credit ratings, Belapan reported on March 27, quoting the Finance Ministry. Last year, Minsk enlisted the services of ABN AMRO to estimate the financial value of Beltranshaz, Belarus's gas-pipeline operator. The Belarusian government said earlier this year that it wants to obtain a sovereign credit rating in the first half of 2007. The Finance Ministry has sent requests to the international credit ratings agencies Standard&Poor's, Moody's, and Fitch Ratings, asking them to state their prices and terms for providing such a rating for Belarus. A country's sovereign credit rating, made by experts on the basis of an analysis of its political and economic situation, reflects confidence in its ability to honor its hard-currency borrowing commitments. A sovereign credit rating is believed to make it easier for a country to deal in securities on international markets and to attract foreign loans.

March 30, 2007

BELARUS REPORTS PROFUSION OF COOPERATION DEALS WITH VENEZUELA

A total of 24 agreements, contracts, and memorandums were signed during the recent seven-day trip to Venezuela by a Belarusian government delegation led by Viktar Sheyman, secretary of the Security Council, Belapan reported on March 29, citing the presidential press service. In particular, Minsk and Caracas signed contracts for the supply of Belarusian commodities to Venezuela, including tractors, trucks, road construction vehicles, televisions, refrigerators, and food products. A number of other deals concerns cooperation in agriculture, including the opening of plants in Venezuela to assemble Belarusian machinery. Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez reportedly agreed to allow Belarusian companies to develop oil fields in his country. A joint Belarusian-Venezuelan oil-production enterprise is to be established in Venezuela by August. Chavez visited Belarus in July 2006, and Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka is expected to pay a state visit to Venezuela in the near future.

May 14, 2007

BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT CONCERNED ABOUT ECONOMIC SLOWDOWN

President Alyaksandr Lukashenka said on May 11 he is disturbed by a slowdown reported in certain economic sectors in the first quarter of 2007, Belapan reported, quoting official sources. Speaking at a government conference, Lukashenka said eight out of 19 key targets for the country's 2007 social and economic development were not met in the first three months of the year. He said there are some "unwelcome trends" in the Belarusian economy, such as declining profitability and decelerating growth of industrial output. On the whole, however, Lukashenka noted that the economy developed steadily in the first quarter, with gross domestic product increasing by 8.5 percent year-on-year.

May 21, 2007

BELARUS SIGNS CONTRACT ON GAZPROM'S PURCHASE OF BELTRANSHAZ STAKE

The Belarusian government and Russia's gas monopoly Gazprom signed a contract in Minsk on May 18 ensuring Gazprom's future purchase of a 50-percent stake in Beltranshaz, Belarus' gas-pipeline network, Belapan reported. Under a framework agreement signed in Moscow on December 31, 2006, Gazprom was to acquire a 50 percent stake worth $2.5 billion in Beltranshaz by June 1, 2010, to form a joint gas-transport company. Gazprom will buy its stake in four 12.5 percent installments between 2007 and 2010.

Belarusian Deputy Prime Minister Uladzimir Syamashka told journalists on May 19 that the $625 million that Belarus will receive from Gazprom for the first installment will "work for the development of economy" and will not be spent on paying off the country's gas debt. Belarus reportedly owed Gazprom $365.3 million at the beginning of April.

June 1, 2007

BELARUS INCREASES EXPORT DUTY ON CRUDE OIL, PETROLEUM PRODUCTS

Following an agreement with Russia earlier this year to unify duties on oil and oil products, the Belarusian government raised the crude oil export duty from $156.40 to $200.60 per ton as of June 1, RFE/RL's Belarus Service and Belapan reported on May 31. The export duties on a number of petroleum products also went up by some 25 percent. Russia revises the export duties on oil and petroleum products every two months depending on fluctuations in world oil prices.

June 7, 2007

BELARUSIAN GAS COMPANY TRANSFERS 12.5 PERCENT STAKE TO RUSSIA'S GAZPROM

Belarus' gas-pipeline network Beltranshaz transferred a 12.5 percent stake to Russian gas monopoly Gazprom on June 6, Belapan reported, quoting Valery Kramar, an aide to the chairman of the State Property Committee. Gazprom paid $625 million for the stake a few days before the transfer. Beltranshaz is now set to hold a shareholders' meeting to agree on changing the company's executive board to include a Gazprom representative. Under an agreement signed in Moscow on December 31, 2006, Gazprom is to acquire a 50 percent stake worth $2.5 billion in Beltranshaz by June 1, 2010, to form a joint gas-transport company. The payment this month was the first of four 12.5 percent installments to be paid between 2007 and 2010.

4. REPRESSIONS

April 3, 2007

BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION POLITICIAN FACES INCARCERATION FOR THIRD TIME

Police arrested opposition politician Andrey Klimau, a member of the United Civic Party, in Minsk on April 3, RFE/RL's Belarus Service reported. Klimau was reportedly arrested on charges of calling for a violent overthrow of the political system

in Belarus. The previous day, Belarusian prosecutors said they have launched a criminal case against Klimau, accusing him of insulting President Alyaksandr Lukashenka in articles published on the website ucpb.org. Klimau spent one year in prison in 2005-06 after a court found him guilty of staging an unauthorized opposition demonstration in Minsk in March 2005. Klimau also spent four years in prison from 1998 to 2002 on charges of embezzlement and forgery. Those charges are widely believed to be politically motivated.

May 4, 2007

BELARUSIAN YOUTH ACTIVIST FINED FOR UNAUTHORIZED MARCH

A district court in Minsk on May 3 convicted Dzmitry Fedaruk, a leader of the unregistered opposition group Youth Front (Malady Front), for organizing an unsanctioned march during the sanctioned Chornobyl Way demonstration on April 26 , Belapan and RFE/RL's Belarus Service reported. The court fined Fedaruk 930,000 Belarusian rubles ($435)."People who had gathered for the Chornobyl Way had to get back home somehow after the end of the demonstration" Fedaruk told RFE/RL. "Since the entire area was encircled by special forces and secret services, we decided to go in a column...to avoid being caught by them. Now I've been accused of organizing an unauthorized march." Fedaruk and four other Youth Front activists are facing criminal prosecution on separate charges of acting on behalf of an unregistered organization under an article of the Criminal Code that carries a prison sentence of up to two years.

May 11, 2007

BELARUSIAN PROSECUTORS REFUSE TO EXAMINE OPPOSITIONIST DETENTION

Prosecutors in Mahilyou, eastern Belarus, have refused to open a criminal investigation into the detention of opposition activist Krystsina Shatsikava in March, RFE/RL's Belarus Service reported on May 11. On March 23, police officers forced Shatsikava into a car in downtown Mahilyou and took her to a mental hospital where she was held until March 26 . Earlier this month Shatsikava received an official answer from prosecutors to her complaint about the incident. The prosecutors responded that both the police officers who detained her and the administration of the mental clinic in which she was kept acted within the framework of powers vested in them by laws on police and on psychiatric assistance. The reason for Shatsikava's forced hospitalization, the prosecutors said, was a "collective complaint" by residents of the house in which Shatsikava lives.

May 16. 2007

BELARUS EXPELS U.S. PROTESTANT MINISTER

A U.S. Protestant minister has been expelled from Belarus after the authorities canceled his temporary residence permit, Belapan reported on May 15, quoting Christian activist Maria Savushkina. According to Savushkina, the authorities accused Decker Travis Todd of involvement in activities "aimed at harming the national security of the Republic of Belarus." Todd is a charity worker and attended a Protestant church in Minsk

May 18, 2007

BELARUS EXPELS ANOTHER FOREIGN PROTESTANT

Belarusian authorities have annulled a residence permit for Jaroslaw Lukasik, a Polish national who has lived with his Belarusian wife and three children in Myadzel district, Minsk Oblast, since 1999, Belapan reported on May 17. Lukasik must now leave Belarus by June 7. Lukasik is a member of the United Church of Christians of Evangelical Faiths in Belarus. The official reason for his expulsion is "activities aimed at harming the national security of the Republic of Belarus in the sphere of relations between faiths" "My husband has not committed any offenses against national security or in the sphere of relations between faiths. He has not been charged with a single related offense," Lukasik's wife told Belapan. Earlier this week Belarus expelled a U.S. Protestant minister, also charging him with "harming the national security of the Republic of Belarus"

May 22, 2007

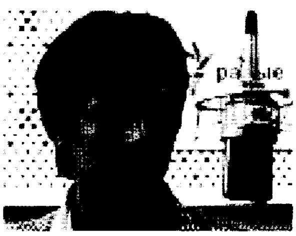
TWO BELARUSIAN OPPOSITIONISTS FINED FOR CHORNOBYL ANNIVERSARY MARCH

A district court in Minsk on May 21 imposed fines on Belarusian Popular Front deputy head Alyaksey Yanukevich and United Civic Party activist Valyantsina Palevikova for their roles in organizing an opposition march in Minsk on April 26 to commemorate the 1986 explosion at the Chornobyl nuclear power plant, Belapan reported. Yanukevich and Palevikova received fines of 930,000 rubles ($435) and 755,000 rubles ($353) respectively. The court found them guilty of obstructing traffic during the march. The authorities "have simply started raising money from every source, including from our pockets," Palevikova commented on her punishment.

May 30, 2007

BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION YOUTHS FINED

A district court in Minsk on May 29 fined four activists of the unregistered Youth Front, finding them guilty of acting on behalf of an unauthorized organization, RFE/RL's Belarus Service reported. Dzmitry Fedaruk was fined 1,240,000 rubles ($580), while Aleh Korban, Barys Haretski, and Alyaksey Yanusheuski were each fined 930,000 rubles ($435). The fifth defendant in the trial, Anastasiya Palazhanka, received an official warning. Yanusheuski is currently in the Czech Republic, pondering an application for political asylum. The May 29 punishments are significantly milder, compared to jail terms of six to 24 months handed down for similar offenses to four members of the unregistered organization Partnership in August 2006, or to the 18 months in a penal colony given to Youth Front leader Dzmitry Dashkevich in September 2006. Domestic and international human rights activists have called on the Belarusian government to abolish Article 193.1 of the Criminal Code, which penalizes participation in an unauthorized organization. "The very existence of Article 193-1 in the Criminal Code violates the Constitution of Belarus, which guarantees the freedom of association, as well as Article 22 of the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights and commitments to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. It allows bringing criminal action against an unregistered organization even if its activities were not directed against state or public security and did not violate public order or the rights and freedoms of others," the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights said in November 2006.



Dzmitry Fedaruk

June 4, 2007
BELARUSIAN PASTOR ARRESTED FOR SECOND TIME IN A WEEK

Belarusian police on June 3 arrested Antoni Bakun, the pastor of a Minsk-based Protestant community called the St. John Divine Church, Belapan and the *Nasha Niva* weekly reported



Bakun was arrested while conducting a religious service and subsequently placed in a pretrial detention center. He is reportedly to stand trial on a charge of "organizing and conducting a religious meeting without permission." Bakun was arrested on the same charge on May 27 and fined $290 by a court the following day. In recent weeks, Belarusian authorities have taken action against a number of Christian believers, expelling a U.S. Protestant minister and anulling the residency permit of Polish member of an Evangelical Christian church.

5. BELARUS & the WORLD

April 18, 2007
PACE PRESIDENT CALLS ON BELARUS TO COME CLOSER TO EUROPEAN STRUCTURES

Rene van der Linden, the president of the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly (PACE), on April 17 urged Minsk to "show your good will and show that you want to become at last a member of the European family," Belapan reported. Van der Linden said he is "not in favor" of Belarus' isolation, adding that it is "very bad for both sides" Van der Linden said that both Europe and Belarus should give "clear signs" of their readiness for cooperation. One of these signs, he continued, would be Minsk's consent to the assessment of the question of political prisoners in Belarus by international experts. Van der Linden described as "absolutely unacceptable" the detention and the persecution of five members of Youth Front movement. "I believe that the Belarusian government will cease to imprison those who only express their opinions and take part in demonstrations. It would be a good sign of the readiness for the cooperation," Van der Linden said.

April 25, 2007
BELARUS CONSENTS TO OPENING EUROPEAN COMMISSION'S OFFICE IN MINSK.

The Belarusian government has given its consent to opening an office of the European Commission in Minsk, Belapan reported on April 24, quoting Christiane Hohmann, a spokeswoman for European External Relations Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner. Hohman added that the two sides plan to discuss conditions for opening the office.

April 26, 2007
U.S. OFFICIAL SEES NO INTEREST ON THE PART OF BELARUS TO IMPROVE TIES WITH WEST

David Kramer, U.S. deputy assistant secretary of state for European and Eurasian affairs, told journalists in Minsk on April 25 that Washington has not seen "much evidence" from the Belarusian government to support its recent expressions of interest in improving relations with the West, Belapan and RFE/RL's Belarus Service reported. Kramer, who arrived in Minsk on April 23, met with opposition politicians, relatives of political prisoners and students, and with Foreign Minister Syarhey Martynau and Natalia Pyatkevich, deputy head of the Presidential Administration. Kramer said he took advantage of these meetings to spell out the "minimum steps" that Washington expects Minsk to take toward better bilateral relations. These steps, Kramer elaborated, include releasing all political prisoners, dropping charges against other opposition activists, allowing the Chornobyl Way demonstration on April 26 to take place peacefully, and allowing the congress of democratic forces in Belarus in May to take place without any problems. "Absent those steps, I fear that relations could deteriorate," Kramer noted. "Under the Belarus Democracy Reauthorization Act that Congress passed [in December 2006] and President Bush signed [in January 2007], we have additional steps we can take to increase the pressure on the government. I hope that won't be necessary, but the ball is in the court of the government of Belarus."

April 27, 2007
POLISH-BASED TV BELARUS TO GO ON AIR IN OCTOBER

TV Belarus, a channel funded by the Polish government, will start its broadcasts to Belarus on October 15, Belapan reported on April 26, quoting Polish Television journalist Agnieszka Romaszewska, who is coordinating the project. A relevant agreement to this effect was signed by Polish Television and the government earlier this week. TV Belarus is expected to broadcast into Belarus via satellite, providing coverage of major events in the country. The Polish government will offer 16 million zlotys ($5.7 million) for the project this year. Apart from Polish reporters, the project will involve some 20 Belarusian journalists. The channel is expected to broadcast 15 hours per day.

May 4, 2007
MANIFESTO OF 'BELARUSIAN-RUSSIAN UNIFICATION' APPEARS ON INTERNET

The Russian website stringer.ru has published a document called "Minsk Manifesto of Belarusian-Russian Unification" which is signed by Leanid Sinitsyn and Uladzimir Parfyanovich, RFE/RL's Belarus Service reported on May 2. The authors present themselves as adherents of "true" Belarusian-Russian integration and propose that Belarus joins Russia on the basis of the Russian Constitution as an "associate subject" of the Russian Federation. According to them, Belarus can remain a "sovereign state" after such a move. Sinitsyn and Parfyanovich suggest that Belarus adopts the Russian ruble as its currency and transfers its gas-pipeline network to Russian ownership. "It is an attempt to fill the niche of those who want to sell Belarus at the lowest price possible. It is quite a cynical and open [attempt]," Anatol Lyabedzka, leader of the opposition United Democratic Party, told RFE/RL's Belarus Service. "There can be no sovereignty [for Belarus] within the Russian Federation. Russia is a country based on a principle of federalism. Giving some sovereign status for Belarus means creating problems within Russia" Lyabedzka added. Sinitsyn was manager of the presidential election campaign of Alyaksandr Lukashenka in 1994, the first head of Lukashenka's presidential administration, and a deputy prime minister. Sinitsyn quit the Belarusian government in 1996.

Parfyanovich, a three-time Olympic kayaking champion, was a member of Belarus'Chamber of Representatives in 2000-2004.

May 18, 2007

BELARUS FAILS TO WIN SEAT ON UN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

The UN General Assembly on May 17 elected Slovenia and Bosnia-Herzegovina to the UN Human Rights Council, thus blocking Belarus's bid to obtain a seat on the 47-member body, international media reported. International human rights groups campaigned for weeks to prevent the choice of Belarus after the Eastern European group submitted only Belarus and Slovenia for the two seats from that region."Belarus has an appalling human rights record," Urmi Shah, a spokeswoman for the New York-based group Human Rights Watch, told RFE/RL. "In January of this year, the [UN's] special rapporteur on Belarus, Adrian Severin, noted that the government had failed absolutely to cooperate with the UN's human rights mechanisms," Shah said. Western countries persuaded Bosnia to enter the campaign earlier this week. "We were particularly concerned about Belarus. Some have called it the last dictatorship in Europe," U.S. Ambassador to the UN Zalmay Khalilzad told journalists after Belarus lost the seat to Bosnia in the second round of voting.

June 11, 2007

BELARUSIAN UNION BOSS DENIES FALSIFICATION OF INTERNATIONAL PETITION

Leanid Kozik, chairman of the pro-government Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus (FPB), has denied accusations that he forged foreign labor union leaders' signatures on a petition against the suspension of Belarus' benefits under the EU's Generalized System of Preferences (GSP), Belapan reported on June 9. Guy Ryder, secretary-general of the International Trade Union Confederation, and John Monks, secretary-general of the European Trade Union Confederation, said in a letter to EU Trade Commissioner Peter Mandelson that the Belarusian government ordered the FPB to win international support for its drive against the suspension of the GSP benefits, scheduled to take effect on June 21. The FPB claimed last month that its petition was signed by trade union organizations representing 16 countries, including the Moscow-headquartered International Association of Metal Workers' Trade Unions (MOP), an affiliation of Belarusian, Ukrainian, Kazakh, Moldovan, Armenian, Azerbaijani, and Georgian labor unions. However, MOP Chairman Nikolai Shatokhin subsequently denied this claim, saying that neither he nor other representatives of the organization signed the appeal."Several of those union leaders whose signatures were included at the end of the statement have now stated categorically that they did not sign the statement and do not agree with it. Their apparent signatures were in fact scanned from other documents they had signed— such as participants' lists from meetings held in Belarus — and copied into the FPB statement." Ryder and Monks said in their letter. The GSP benefits for Belarus are due to be suspended as punishment for the government's failure to implement the International Labor Organization's recommendations regarding the trade union movement in Belarus.

June 14, 2007

RUSSIA URGES BELARUS TO REPAY GAS DEBTS BY END OF YEAR.

Russian Ambassador to Belarus Aleksandr Surikov told journalists in Minsk on June 11 that Belarus needs to pay its gas debts to Russia by the end of this year, Belapan reported. Surikov said that under a deal on 2007 gas deliveries signed by Belarus and Russia's gas monopoly Gazprom on December 31, 2006, Minsk was required to pay just 55 percent of its gas bills in the first six months of 2007. At the same time, Surikov noted that Belarusian companies have paid the Belarusian Finance Ministry in full for gas supplies in 2007, and expressed confidence that the ministry has therefore "accumulated" funds to repay the debt to Russia. Last month Belarusian First Deputy Prime Minister Uladzimir Syamashka said that Belarus owes Russia some $400 million for gas supplies.

June 18, 2007

EU TO SCRAP TRADE PREFERENCES TO BELARUS OVER LABOR RIGHTS

Trade Commissioner Peter Mandelson on June 15 said the EU will withdraw its preferential trade tariffs for Belarus as of June 21 because of the country's failure to reform labor rights, Reuters and AP reported. "Europe attaches great importance to work and labor conditions, and increasingly to environmental safeguards also. In this case Belarus is clearly flouting ILO [International Labor Organization] standards," Mandelson noted in a statement. Earlier the same day, the Geneva-based ILO issued a statement saying that Belarus has not made progress on giving workers the right to join trade unions. Belarusian exports will now be subject to the EU's standard import tariffs, which are three percentage points higher than preferential rates. The move will affect some 10 percent of Belarus' exports to the EU, mostly farm machinery and chemicals.

June 19, 2007

UN HALTS PERMANENT PROBES INTO HUMAN-RIGHTS SITUATION IN BELARUS

The Geneva-based U.N. Human Rights Council on June 18 voted to eliminate the positions of its rapporteurs on human-rights observance in Belarus and Cuba in a move opposed by the United States, international news agencies reported. Russia reportedly led demands for an end to the mandate of the human-rights rapporteur for Belarus. The decision came as a compromise necessary for setting out new rules and procedures for the UN body, which was formed a year ago to replace the UN Human Rights Commission. The compromise allows the council to censure human-rights abusers with a simple majority of member states. The council kept nine countries on the list for continued scrutiny of human rights, including North Korea, Cambodia, and Sudan. "Given the poor human rights conditions in Belarus and Cuba, the council's decision to reduce its focus on those countries is impossible to justify," Peggy Hicks, a director at Human Rights Watch, commented later the same day. "The UN General Assembly has condemned Belarus's shameful record, and rejected its candidacy for the council. Why is the council itself applying a different standard?"

Belarusians Abroad

Belarusian Youth Organization Reestablished in Poland

On June 18, 2007 in the press-center of Polish parliament's Law and Justice party, the Youth Organization of Belarusian Popular Front (BPF) announced its new name, action plan and leadership structure. The original Youth Organization was created in October 1993 as the youth faction of BPF; in 1997 it was transformed into a wide opposition movement. After the split of the BPF it acted as its youth organization until October 2001.

The youth organization supporting the Conservative Christian Party of BPF emerged again in 2006 and is now being reestablished as *Young Revival*. Its chairman, Raman Kavalchuk says: "The youth movement of the BPF will be registered in two EU countries and will not provide any information about its members or structure to the authorities in Belarus."

During its initial conference in Warsaw, *Young Revival* nominated its Executive Council representing all regions of Belarus. It also adopted a new action plan which includes an information campaign designed to increase public awareness of the current decline of democracy in Russia and the unpredictable Russian foreign policy, as well as to convince the Belarusian population of benefits from broader cooperation with NATO.

The delegation of *Young Revival* also met with leaders of the *Forum of Young* faction, affiliated with Poland's ruling Law and Justice party.

Belarusian Success in an Investment Contest

Andrey Chyzh, the treasurer of the Belarusian-American Youth Association, has won an enviable 10th place from nearly two thousand student entrants in an investment contest, organized annually by *Barron's*, the prestigious U.S. financial weekly. The magazine is associated with *The Wall Street Journal.*



The contest was held between October 30, 2006 and March 30, 2007. It was entered by over 2000 participants: 1847 students and 131 professors of American universities.

Source: www.zbma.net

The 4th Festival Of Belarusian Culture

Wroclaw, June 4-10, 2007

By Jan Maksymiuk

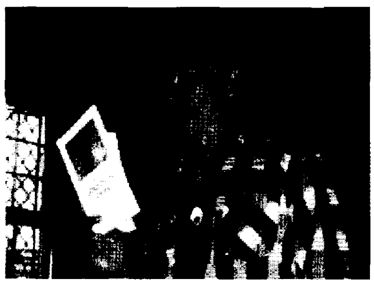
The Wroclaw-based Collegium of Eastern Europe - a Polish NGO devoted to promoting cultural and social ties with Poland's eastern neighbors, primarily Belarus and Ukraine - organized on June 4-10 for the fourth time an event called the Festival of Belarusian Culture.

The Collegium, led by Jan Andrzej Dabrowski, enjoys moral and financial support of the Polish government and regional authorites in implementing its programs intended to bring the culture of Poland's eastern neighbors closer to the Poles.

Regarding Belarus, the Collegium's key program focuses on publishing translations of prominent Polish authors into Belarusian and prominent Belarusian authors into Polish. From the Belarusian side, the program is coordinated by scholar and translator Lyavon Barshcheuski from Minsk.

This June, the Festival of Belarusian Culture in Wroclaw featured concerts of the Leon Gurvich Jazz Project, a Hamburg-based folk-jazz group led by pianist Leon Gurvich from Minsk, and of the Classic-Avantgarde Ensamble from Minsk.

There were also presentations of the two freshly published books of translations from Belarusian into Polish: eminent Belarusian poet Ales Razanau's collection of "versets" titled Lesna droga (A Road in the Wood) and an anthology of 10 young Belarusian poets, Pepek nieba (The Heaven's Navel).



Ales Razanau

Razanau's book was translated by Jan Maksymiuk from Prague and Oleg Latyszonek from Bialystok. The anthology of young poets was translated by a group of translators, including Jan Maksymiuk, and edited by Adam Pomorski, a well-known Polish translator and vice-president of the Polish PEN Club. Razanau and several young Belarusian poets participated in the presentations of their books in Wroclaw.

In June 2006, the 3rd Festival of Belarusian Culture included the presentations of Polish translations of poetry by Andrej Khadanovich and prose by Uladzimir Arlou.

The Collegium of Eastern Europe was founded in 2001, following a suggestion from Jan Nowak-Jezioranski, a longtime director of the Polish Service of Radio Free Europe.

HISTORICAL DATES

April 10, 1900

Birthdate of **Hauryla Harecki,** a geologist, geographer, economist, pioneer of the Belarusian cultural renaissance.

June 14, 1900

Birthdate of **Michas Zabejda-Sumicki,** a famous Belarusian opera singer. Lived and performed in Kharbin (China), Milan, Warsaw, Prague.

June 19, 1924

Birthdate of **Vasil Bykau,** an outstanding Belarusian writer and public figure. Most of his works covered the topic of World War Two, experienced by him as a soldier.

Towards the end of his life he was forced to seek refuge abroad. He lived in Finland, Germany and the Czech Republic. He was forced out of his homeland due to attacks in the state-run press and censorship of his writings. The regime continues to take revenge against Bykau even after his death. Vasil Bykau's books are not being republished in Belarus and films about his life and creative work are banned.

Bykau was considered for the Nobel prize in literature in late 1990. He died on June 22, 2003.

July 3, 1802

Ihnat Damejka (Domeyko), a Chilean geologist, traveler and educator was born near Karelichy in western Belarus.

He studied at Vilnia University. After participating in the anti-Russian uprising of 1830-31 he moved to France and graduated from the School of Mining in Paris.

In 1839 the government of Chile invited Damejka to the post of professor at the University of Santiago. Soon he was elected the rector of this institution and occupied this position for 15 years.

He conducted many geological and geographical expeditions in the Pacific coast region, where he also discovered deposits of saltpeter and other minerals. .

Damejka was the first to introduce the metric system of measurements in Latin America and was the founder of Chile's meteorology. He was the author of many books on Chile's geography and geology. After him were named: a mountain range, the mineral *domeykit*, and several Chilean cities.

July 10, 1900

Birthdate of **Piotra Siarhijevic,** a renowned Belarusian painter. Lived and worked in the city of Vilnia.

July 15, 1410

Anniversary of the **Battle of Grunwald,** one of the biggest in the Middle Ages. The German Teutonic Knights, with West European mercenaries, were then decisively defeated by an army commanded by the Polish King Jahajla (Jagiello) and Litva's Grand DukeVitaut, supported by Czech Hussite and vassal Tartar contingents.

Thoughts and Observations

With Lukashenka Out of Sight, Belarus Opposition Stages Independence Day Rally

By David Marples

The 89th anniversary of the formation of the Belarusian National Republic was commemorated in Minsk with the largest public anti-government demonstration since last year's Chernobyl march. Although the authorities reacted harshly and at times resorted to violence and arrests, the official response was surprisingly tentative. The regime attempted to offset the demonstration by holding alternative functions to commemorate an independent Belarus, including a concert at the National Library and the ballet "Swan Lake" at the Palace of the Republic on October Square, for which the doors opened at 11.30 am. By contrast the organizers of the demonstration, led by the leader of the United Democratic Forces, Alyaksandr Milinkevich, were understandably jubilant and buoyed particularly by the size of the gathering and support from leaders of the EU, as well as by the fact that the Lukashenka regime provided official recognition of the March 25 commemoration for the first time.

Although the organizers, who included the leader of the Party of the Belarusian Popular Front Vintsuk Vyachorka, had declared that the action would be peaceful and non-confrontational, the Minsk City Council refused permission for the "Day of Will" to be celebrated in October Square. Instead, officials allowed a march from the Academy of Sciences (further to the east) to Bangalor Square. Milinkevich, Vyachorka, Viktar Ivashkevich, Igar Shynkaryk, and Alyaksei Lyaukovich, were invited to the council and asked to sign documents in which it was stated that any violations of civic order would be regarded as a criminal offense. Shynkaryk, a member of the United Civic Party, maintained that he and his colleagues had refused to sign these documents because of the authorities' confrontational attitude.

The initial signs were of a possible major confrontation in the Belarusian capital. The authorities prepared with their familiar precision. On the morning of the 25th, Belarusian Internet users discovered that several websites had been shut down, including those of the Belarusian Helsinki Committee and Radio Liberty. Passengers on the electric train from Orsha to Minsk reported the arrests of several young people, while workers of the State Auto Inspection stopped known opposition members driving into Minsk at the entrance to the city. The sensitive October Square area, where opposition supporters established a tent city following last year's presidential elections, was placed under the jurisdiction of the notorious special forces commander Dzmitry Paulichenka while Yury Padabed, commander of riot police, gathered troops close to the state department store.

According to one account, the center of Minsk resembled a besieged fortress. The center of the city was sealed off, with the Kupalauskaya and Kastrychnitskaya metro stations closed, and the Universalny store and McDonald's shut down "for sanitary reasons." However, no serious clashes took place. The militia prevented the marchers from entering the center of the city and dispersed them into smaller groups. The size of the gathering has been estimated at between 5,000 and 15,000, according to various reports. Most sources suggest that at least 10,000 people took part, including a high proportion of youth.



Freedom Day - Our Holiday!

Although the main body reached the Academy of Sciences at 1.30 pm and prepared for a sanctioned meeting, a another group was forced to assemble near the Sports Palace and forced off Avenue of the Victors near to the Moscow Cinema. A skirmish with militia took place, but many demonstrators later found their way to the Academy of Sciences. There the proceedings were opened by Vyachorka, who applauded the 50th anniversary of the European Union and read greetings from Ivonka Survilla, chair of the Belarusian Rada in exile. Anatol Lyabedzka appealed for the release of political prisoners, and several foreign politicians addressed the audience, including the Vice-President of the European Parliament, Janus Onyszkiewicz, members of the Russian Right Forces, and the Azerbaijani Musavat.

Milinkevich was the final speaker. He thanked European politicians -- singling out German Chancellor Angela Merkel -- for their support and declared that the meeting signified the inevitability of change in Belarus and that "We will be in Europe!" About 300 people made their way to the National Library, but the concert there ended abruptly. About 70 arrests were made prior to and during the protest march and nine people have been imprisoned to date. Milinkevich needed medical treatment after a clash with militia forces, and evidently both he and Vyachorka may face charges under Criminal Code Article 342, for organization of actions that disturb the public peace, which carries a maximum sentence of up to three years' imprisonment.

March 25 traditionally marks the beginning of a series of opposition protests that culminate on April 26, the anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster. The events of last Sunday appear to have reinvigorated the opposition. Lukashenka has not been seen in public for over two weeks (which has led to rumors of illness), and the vicious brutality of last year failed to materialize, ostensibly because deprived of his traditionally firm support from Russia, the Belarusian president cannot afford to alienate the EU further. On the other hand, the regime has taken no steps to initiate a new dialogue in response to EU appeals, suggesting that further intense external and internal pressure will be required to bring about any significant changes to the status quo.

(*Narodnaya volya*, March 23; BBC News, March 25; *Belorusskie novosti*, March 27; *Belorusy i Rynok*, March 26-April 2; *Belorusskaya delovaya gazeta*, March 26; Charter 97, March 26)

Source: Eurasia Daily Monitor, March 28, 2007

Belarus: Has Regime Adopted New Tactics Toward Opposition?

By Jan Maksymiuk

March 27, 2007 (RFE/RL) -- The Belarusian opposition on March 25 staged the biggest rally in Minsk since the protests that followed the flawed presidential election in March 2006.

An estimated crowd of 10,000 people took part in the rally, in support of the country's independence, in front of Minsk's Academy of Sciences, after coming there in three separate columns. The columns had to sidestep police cordons or break through them with incidental scuffles.

Police, however, were relatively tolerant and did not resort to major arrests or beating, as was the case on some previous occasions.

What's more, the city authorities organized two competing events on the same day, also under slogans supporting Belarusian independence. Does this mean the opposition and the government have finally found common ground in their struggle for hearts and minds in Belarus?

Freedom Day

On March 25, popularly called Freedom Day, the Belarusian opposition every year marks the anniversary of the short-lived Belarusian People's Republic, the first Belarusian state, which was proclaimed in Minsk on March 25, 1918 and crushed by the Bolsheviks some nine months later.

Thus, the date of March 25 clearly reminds Belarusians that their ancestors did not necessarily link the fate of their state to that of Russia, as the official historiography in present-day Belarus states.

Throughout the rule of Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka, Freedom Day has been an anathema to the government, whose declared goal was to seek rapprochement with Moscow rather than detachment from it. Therefore, the Belarusian authorities have, in the past, tried to prevent the opposition from taking people to the streets on March 25.

"These people do not want any longer to look from an ideological point of view like populists or socialists but want to build normal capitalism."

This year, however, apart from its usual approach of making preventive arrests and beefing up the police presence in Minsk, the government resorted to a different tactic.

The city authorities organized an open-air concert in the capital on March 25 at noon and another one at a city airport in the evening. The concerts were held under the widely advertised motto "For An Independent Belarus."

It seems that the primary goal of these concerts was to divert the attention of Minsk residents from the opposition-organized rally but, as some opposition activists were quick to indicate, in this way the government obliquely celebrated Freedom Day on its own.

City-Wide Holiday

Viktar Ivashkevich, deputy head of the opposition Belarusian Popular Front and an organizer of the opposition rally, told RFE/RL's Belarus Service that, thanks to the authorities, Freedom Day had for the first time become an all-city holiday.

"It turned out that the action extended to the entire city. Every man on [Freedom] Day was given the chance to celebrate in his own way," Ivashkevich said. "Those who wanted to scuffle with police, did so. Those who wanted a peaceful march, got it. Those who wanted a rally, got it. Those who wanted to celebrate the day jointly with the authorities, got it. It was a full-blown holiday."

But Minsk-based philosopher Ihar Babkou suggests that there may have also been a deliberate intention on the part of the authorities to take advantage of the ideological stock of the opposition and give official backing to the idea of independent Belarusian statehood.

According to Babkou, after appropriating national properties those in power in Belarus may now want to appropriate some pro-independence sentiments.

"It seems to me that [the authorities] have begun to softly include, to softly absorb into their own armory, all things that formerly were characteristic of the opposition. With what can it be connected? It can be connected with the fact that properties have finally been divided, and that these people do not want any longer to look from an ideological point of view like populists or socialists but want to build normal capitalism on the periphery [of the former Soviet Union]," Babkou said.

More Carrots, Less Sticks

Moreover, Babkou argued that the West, preoccupied with more important global issues than the "last dictatorship in Europe," may soften its stance with regard to President Lukashenka and try to "softly absorb" Belarus into its fold by offering carrots rather than sticks to the regime.

"I think that Belarus today does not belong to the 10 top bugbears of the world. In this sense, I think that the old Europe, at least the old Europe, will continue its strategy of a soft absorption, that is, as Lukashenka is now trying to softly absorb and neutralize the opposition, the old Europe will try to do the same with the Belarusian regime," Babkou said.

In view of the colder relations between Minsk and Moscow following a row over gas and oil prices in January, such a European approach toward the Belarusian regime cannot be ruled out.

As Belarusians in Minsk fought their way through police cordons to manifest their support for independence of their country, European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso said during the celebrations of the 50th anniversary of the united Europe in Berlin that the EU is ready to form "a full partnership" with Belarus and boost financial aid to the country if it adopts democratic reforms.

(Hanna Sous and Yury Drakakhrust from RFE/RL's Belarus Service contributed to this report.)

UN: Belarus Fails To Win Seat On Rights Council

May 18, 2007 (RFE/RL) -- After two rounds of voting at the UN General Assembly, Belarus has failed in its bid to win a seat on the United Nations' Human Rights Council.

Bosnia entered the race at the last minute, reportedly persuaded by Western governments alarmed at the prospect of Belarus being elected to the council.

In the vote on May 17, Slovenia was elected with 188 votes in the first round in the 192-member General Assembly. In the second round of voting, Bosnia beat Belarus by 112 to 72 votes.

U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Zalmay Khalilzad spoke on May 17 to journalists at the UN in New York after the vote in the General Assembly.

"We were particularly concerned about Belarus [being elected a member of the Human Rights Council]. Some have called it the last dictatorship in Europe," Khalilzad said.

Poor Rights Record

Belarus has been routinely criticized for its human rights record, under autocratic President Alyaksandr Lukashenka. Critics charge that Lukashenka's regime has falsified elections, imprisoned opposition activists, and curtailed free media.

The United States and the European Union have placed travel sanctions on the president and other senior officials.

Former Belarusian Ambassador to the UN Henadz Buraukin said he understands the logic of Belarus attempting to get a seat on the council.

"Why did Minsk choose this council to try to get a seat on? I think they chose it so they could say to [critics of Belarus], 'You criticize us for our human rights record, but we have now been included on the UN Human Rights Council,'" Buraukin said.

Before Bosnia entered the race, only Belarus and Slovenia were contesting the two seats. The distinct possibility that Belarus could have been elected to the council prompted an outcry from many human rights groups.

NGO Lobbying

A number of rights groups, including U.S.-based Freedom House and Human Rights Watch, appealed to the General Assembly to reject Belarus's bid.

Hillel Neuer, the executive director of the Geneva-based UN Watch, a group that monitors the performance of the United Nations, said his group tried to convince governments that human rights abusers should not have a role on the rights council.

"We said [to governments] that Belarus is a government that refuses to cooperate with the Human Rights Council's own investigator on Belarus. How can you run for a seat on a body with which you refuse to cooperate with their simple requests?" Neuer said.

Lukashenka's regime has been criticized for its rights abuses But Neuer said that Belarus failing to get elected to the council is only a partial victory. Of concern, he says, is the successful election to the council of Egypt, Angola, and Qatar -- countries he says have poor records on human rights.

The UN Human Rights Council was created in March 2006 to replace the UN Human Rights Commission.

The commission had been discredited because some countries with poor rights records had used their membership to protect one another from condemnation.

But the new council has also come in for criticism, most recently when it decided in March to end scrutiny of Iran and Uzbekistan.

Neuer said that not that much has changed from the old human rights commission. He says countries still vote to protect each other.

"The council is a bit of a joke. It would be the stuff of perfect comedy, if it weren't so tragic," Neuer said.

"When it was inaugurated last year, the new council was supposed to be a reform of the discredited commission. It was supposed to, I'm quoting now the High Commissioner for Human Rights Louise Arbour, who hailed it as the 'dawn of a new era.' Well, 12 months later not a single human rights abuse in any of the worst abusers, listed by Freedom House for example, the 19 countries that are the worst abusers, not a single one has been addressed."

All of the 47 members on the Geneva-based council have now been elected.

Source: RFE/RL Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova Report, May 18, 2007

Conference on Democracy and Security, Prague, June 6, 2007

Belarusian Review's correspondent, Mr. Raman Kavalchuk, attended the conference and was able to conduct several interviews: with Alyaksandr Milinkevich, Iryna Krasouskaya, and other personalities.

More information on the course of conference, as well as the full text of interviews may be found on our Web site www. belarusianreview.org

Milinkevich Discusses Belarusian Opposition 'Schism'

By Brian Whitmore

Alyaksandr Milinkevich, who led street protests in Belarus after the October 2006 presidential election, was recently voted out of his post as the head of the Belarusian opposition coalition. RFE/RL spoke to Milinkevich on the sidelines of the Democracy and Security Conference in Prague on June 6.

RFE/RL: Do you think that, looking at the newly worsening relationship between Russia and Belarus, the opposition in Belarus has opportunities it didn't have before? Also, do you think that, because of the schisms in internal Belarusian opposition, it could lose those opportunities?

Alyaksandr Milinkevich: I think that in Russia, the attitude towards our country is unambiguous. For most Russian politicians, it's very important to keep Belarus in the Russian political and economic spheres of influence. This is why Russia behaves the way it does. It turns off the gas to remind Belarus that it's dependent, then turns it on again when Belarus starts borrowing from Russia and paying it back with the help of its own resources. Of course, Russia can be an ally in the fight against dictatorship because evidently Russian politicians are tired of [Belarusian President Alyaksandr] Lukashenka.

But I think that Russia's goals differ somewhat from those of our democratic opposition. Our goal is a free Belarus, a democratic Belarus whose main strategic goal is integration into Europe. In the strategic sphere, these goals are, of course, different. I want to reiterate that Belarus must have a good-natured and fair relationship with Russia, but we insist on principle that our nation must remain an independent state.

RFE/RL: Given the state of relations between Russia and Belarus, are there now both opportunities and dangers for the Belarusian opposition?

Milinkevich: First of all, Russia is a less predictable country today because democracy is on the decline. Reliable, stable, and nonthreatening countries are democratic ones. I want very much for Russia to return to a democratic path of development. This is very important: they are our neighbor. Nevertheless, I think that the main force that will change the situation in our country is us. Support from Western democracies is very important. It's very important for Russia to realize that, as a regime, it can never have good relations. But it is upon us to bring freedom to Belarus.

RFE/RL: Do you think that as a result of the schisms in internal opposition that were evident in your latest congress in Minsk, you will lose your opportunities? What are the consequences of this?

Milinkevich: Of course, one has to fight dictatorship together, with a common fist. Not everyone thinks so. Certain party leaders say that the time to unite will be the presidential election, but in everyday life one can work for the benefit of one's own party rather than for a common cause. I think that this is a mistake because under dictatorship, one cannot just work for one's own party. Isolated parties and civil organizations will be destroyed. But I wouldn't say that we have a schism, we just have different perspectives on strategy. I am for an active strategy. I am for a strategy in which we approach

people. I am not prepared to wait for another election, which are useless anyway. Our votes aren't counted. Elections for us are merely another informational campaign, a mobilizing campaign. But they are in no way a means of acquiring power. In our country, we cannot change the government through elections. How can we change it? Through street action, through acts of civil disobedience. This was the case in many countries, as I said today. It was the case in Poland during Solidarity, it was the case in Czechoslovakia, and many other countries. If they don't want to listen to us at elections, they must listen to us in the streets. That's my position. But certain party leaders say: "Europe is offering a dialogue with the regime. Let's participate in this dialogue." I'm for the dialogue, but I think it will happen later, when we prove that we are a worthy partner. The regime doesn't want to sit with us at the negotiating table. We are not a political subject from the point of view of the regime. We have to prove that we're a force.

"groups with differing views (can) collaborate"

RFE/RL: Do you think that there are elements of the regime with which you can negotiate and collaborate? The authorities are not a singular entity, and looking at other revolutions, there were always situations in which the opposition collaborated with some elements. Is this possible in Belarus or not?

Milinkevich: Of course the authorities are not homogeneous. There are people there who don't like the current situation. There are people who understand that the country is approaching a dead end. There are dissenting sentiments even in the police, even in the special services. There are many intelligent, educated people there. But I think that the fear in the bureaucratic elite is so great, much greater than in society, that the bureaucratic elite itself will not come to an agreement. The bureaucratic elite itself will not create a turnover. And also let's remember that our bureaucratic elite is entirely appointed, not elected. When the mayor of Kyiv supported the Orange Revolution, he did so because he was elected by the people. He wasn't afraid of the prime minister. We don't have people like that. Our authorities are desperately afraid of their leader, even though many don't like him. We must demonstrate this force, we must start to overcome, and then many of them will be able to take the risk and cross over to our side. But we are the ones who must begin this process.

RFE/RL: What really stands behind the schism in the opposition? Is it just different views, or is there some intrigue?

Milinkevich: Of course, it's a different view, as I said, on strategy. It's different with different leaders. Additionally, in Belarus there is a battle not only for freedom but also a battle for the preservation of independence. And different political leaders have a different view on the geopolitical decision of our country. Some look to the east, and some look to the west. Some say that independence isn't the greatest value, but for me it's sacred. Of course, we're different, and when we were united during presidential elections, we said, "Now we're not arguing about platforms, about the geopolitical decision. We're not talking about what Belarus will be like later. We're only saying that now we must change the situation, we must destroy the dictatorial regime." And it's normal that such wide coalitions like the one we had, in the period between administrations, shatter to pieces. But we'll continue to collaborate regardless. We're not enemies, and I don't see a tragedy in this. It is natural because such a wide coalition is artificial, it's an imitation of solidarity. I think that today it's natural to be in groups with differing views that collaborate with each other.

RFE/RL: When you look at the former Soviet Union, there have been differing directions of development, some towards democracy, others away from it. In the Baltics, it's clear. In Russia, it became clear that it is no longer a democratic government. Georgia is more positive, as is Ukraine. What explains this difference?

Milinkevich: When I am asked: "Why do you have a dictatorship? The Baltics and Ukraine don't have one, but you do," I see the biggest problem in Belarus today is that, in our country, the nation isn't fully formed. In the time of the Russian Empire, then in the time of the Soviet Union, we turned out to be the most denationalized people, a people that was deprived of the knowledge of its roots, a people that was deprived of a language, a knowledge of its history. Belarusians have a very beautiful history, but most of them don't know this history, they think that it began with the great October Socialist Revolution. And when the nation isn't fully formed because it was deprived of historical memory, of a culture, it becomes very difficult for this nation to go through reforms. There are Lithuanians who were with us in a common state for 1,000 years. We were in the same empire, then in a different state, then in one common state. A very similar history, but Lithuanians had 20 years of independence between World War I and World War II, and during that time they formed a national spirit. Lithuanians feel that they are a family, but not all Belarusians do.

RFE/RL: This is the major factor?

Milinkevich: This is a very important point, this feeling of family, when trials come, when it's necessary to get through a difficult juncture, when it's necessary to overcome hunger and cold to achieve a worthy goal. And in these situations, the feeling of nation, the feeling of a people plays a major role.

"a wide coalition is artificial — an imitation of solidarity."

RFE/RL: What can you and other opposition leaders in Belarus do to create these feelings of family?

Milinkevich: It is not surprising that even under conditions of dictatorship, when everything Belarusian is suppressed, nevertheless the feeling of nation grows. However, it comes not through culture, history, and language, but through a feeling of statehood. We have our own state, it defends us, it benefits us, and people start to have a civil patriotism. When we are in power, we will add to this patriotism national, historical, and cultural patriotisms. I think that the nation will endure this difficult journey. Sovietization in the Belorussian Soviet [Socialist] Republic in the USSR was the most beastly. They tried to make Russians of Belarusians, and this was the tragedy of our nation. So I think that the current process is a very difficult one, but there is no alternative.

RFE/RL: I noticed on June 5 that you spoke at length with opposition politician Garry Kasparov. What connections are

there between the Russian and Belarusian opposition at the moment?

Milinkevich: We know each other reasonably well, although I only met Kasparov here. We have a good relationship with the Union of Rightist Forces and with Yabloko. The Russian democratic opposition is going through the same path that we went through. We call this process in Russia the "Belarusization" of internal Russian politics. Everything that our authoritarian regime came up with in its time is repeated in Russia, with a five- or seven-year delay. And yes, unfortunately today [the opposition parties] are not in power. They usually aren't even allowed into local government. Nevertheless, they have influence, though today's Russian government marginalizes democratic forces. And more and more they resemble us. They often talk about the street. If you can't affect change through democratic elections, then you have nothing left to do but to go out onto the street. The only thing is that I am a firm proponent of peace street [demonstrations]. I don't want blood, I don't want violence because if there is violence, we won't attract more people, they'll become scared. We need to show that if you go out on the street despite your fear, people don't die there. Someone might get hit with a club, but not many people land in jail. As a result, the less fear there is in the street, the more possibilities there are.



Alyaksandr Milinkevich

So I'm for peaceful street [demonstrations]. Russian democrats have to collaborate with us because we have a lot of experience, they even say so themselves. And, of course, we also depend on their support. Two neighboring countries with a long history of cooperation have to live as friends, have to live with respect for each other. I hope that in Russia it will become quickly understood that nothing will be gained by mistreating Belarus. One needs to respect the right of every nation to have an autonomous state and build relations --economic, cultural, and otherwise -- but one needs to start with economics, not with slogans, propaganda, and myths.

(Brian Whitmore is an RFE/RL correspondent based in Prague.
Source: RFE/RL Newsline, June 7, 2007, End Note

MEDIA WATCH

PRESS REVIEW

For Independent Belarus (*Respekt*, Prague, March 26, 2007, by Alexandre Gajdamacky) —The same day when the EU celebrated its 50th anniversary, the police in Minsk beat and arrested demonstrators with EU flags. At least Lukashenka's attempt to flirt with the West obtained a realistic outline.

Was perhaps Lukashenka serious about his wintertime friendly overtures to West, pronounced under the pressure of Russia's "gas war"? Now the whole of Europe observed the reality in Minsk, even after the Belarusian opposition offered conciliation.

The symbology of an anniversary adds extra fuel to the fire. On March 25 the opposition recalled the proclamation of the Belarusian People's Republic (BNR, 1918). This reminder of the first independence affects the dictator like a crucifix on the devil. Since 1995, Lukashenka eradicated this tradition, prohibited its symbols and introduced a new holiday: the Soviet Independence Day of July 3, celebrating the liberation of Minsk by the Red Army in 1944.

This year, after Belarus' conflict with imperial Russia, the opposition made a grand gesture: it suggested common celebrations extending from March 25 through July 3. Let Belarusians with the white-red-white flags of the BNR and blue flags of the EU join those Belarusians who prefer Lukashenka and green-red flags. However, police clubs put a definite end to the gesture. Lukashenka refuses to meet his opponents halfway. A demonstration on October Square, where in 2006 protesters against the massive election falsification built a tent city, is prohibited. The dictator is obviously afraid of a repeat of March 2006, when over 40,000 people massed there.

In the morning of March 25 the web pages of several democratic parties, movements and newspapers are blocked. The police preventively arrests opposition activists even outside of the capital; it brutally attacks them on their way to the rally. The policemen do not at all mind being seen by the observers from abroad: the deputy chairman of the European parliament Janusz Onyszkiewicz, representatives of the Polish, Slovak or German parliaments, Russian state Duma's deputy Vladimir Ryzhkov, ambassadors of EU countries and the United States. Later, Lukashenka threatens to deal "with the diplomat provocateurs," since "no country allows foreign ambassadors to take part in unsanctioned rallies."

Beside classic efforts to disperse the demonstrators, the authorities undertake one nonstandard measure, dubbed as "an attempt to privatize the national holiday" by the commentators. On the city's outskirts, next to the National Library and near the Minsk international airport, concerts are staged with the participation of popular singers and actors (with the slogan: for Independent Belarus!)

The authorities are doing their best to lure young people there. Special free-of-charge buses are made available. Universities compile lists of "reliable students" who must attend. Other are "urgently recommended" to either remain on Sunday quietly in their dormitories or, even better, simply leave the city so that the police don't accidentally spoil their "holiday mood."

When a part of the opposition, pushed out of the city's center, attempts to join the spectators of one concert, the discotheque is suddenly closed. The "artists" are replaced by specially adapted watering trucks that finally manage to push the opposition youths from the concert.

What is the EU's reaction? The Eurodeputy Janusz Onyszkiewicz in his speech at an opposition rally expressed it plainly: "Today I saw with my own eyes that Belarus is not a free country, that a dictatorship rules here." Foreign ministries of the Czech Republic and Slovakia denounced the way Belarusian authorities treat the opposition. It seems that Europe saw through Lukashenka



Eurodeputy Onyszkiewicz speaking

The Belarusian opposition considers March 25 their victory - for several reasons. After all, the police behaved with a little more restraint and consideration than before. The state power recognized the holiday de facto by staging its own spiteful cultural action. And, the number of demonstrators was large. Economists estimate that the regime has sufficient means to survive at least another four years, since, in order to preserve stability, Belarusians supposedly will tolerate even a fifty percent lower living standard. Or, could the economists be wrong?

People Cease Being Afraid (*Lidove Noviny*, Prague, June 8, 2007, excerpts from an interview with Alaksandr Milinkevich by Tereza Supova)

LN: U.S. president George W. Bush was recently at a conference in Prague. Did you have an opportunity to talk with him?

Yes, we spoke, but very briefly. President Bush said that Belarus remains in America's attention and tops the list among challenging countries. In speaking about political prisoners, Bush referred immediately to the opposition politician Alaksandr Kazulin. I am very grateful to the United States for many years of support for democracy in our country.

LN: When do you expect a change of regime in your country, or a velvet, orange or other type of revolution?

One can plan a terrorist action, but not a revolution. We are not engaged in terrorism. Of course, we would welcome a revolution as soon as possible, but right now we are preoccupied with a revolution in people's minds. At this moment Belarus remains the most Sovietized republic of the former Soviet Union.

However, I believe the current regime will not hold out for long. It has begun to lose support even among those who have recently occupied leading positions and were avid supporters. Many repressions are so severe that even the regime's advocates do not approve of them. Additionally, the subsidies from Moscow have virtually stopped and Belarus's economy is not prepared for free-market conditions.

LN: In spite of that, Lukashenka announced the preparation of economic reforms and privatization. Can this be implemented?

I would welcome the introduction of reforms - they may lead to liberalization. In the meantime Lukashenka is merely liquidating small and medium-sized businesses much like Lenin used to liquidate the bourgeoisie. Although the proposed reforms would bring Belarus closer to meeting one of the conditions for cooperation with the European Union, so far we have not seen such reforms. I have even written Lukashenka a letter (which was criticized by many in the opposition) in which I expressed my preparedness to help by sharing my Western contacts, once democratization and liberalization begins to take EU conditions into account. In other words, I am prepared to do everything for turning Belarus into a democratic country.

LN: You have mentioned a revolution in people's minds. Are you succeeding? Can one recognize that Belarusians are less afraid, and that you have more supporters?

There is definitely less fear now, though not in the entire country. It is true, however, that many young people have joined us. In the past, when the KGB and militia observed and filmed the demonstrators, onlookers used to cover their faces or turn away. Today, many of them approach the cameras, saying: "Go ahead and film us. We are not afraid." This process is slow, but steadily moving in the right direction. People stopped being afraid of going to jail for 10 or 25 days. You hear comments like: "How can one be a revolutionary without a prison experience?"

LN: What is the road towards a change of regime? Is it through economic factors?

There is the example of China, where small and medium-sized business is growing, yet the regime remains insular. Economic reforms must be followed by political ones, otherwise the overall development of a country will come to a halt. I believe our regime can survive the freeing of political prisoners or allowing some independent press to function again. The hardest blow for the regime would be allowing free and honest elections. After the last presidential elections the regime understood that winning honest elections would be impossible.

Yet I would welcome the beginning of a real transformation. If today's repressions continue unabated, the situation might end catastrophically, possibly with bloodshed, and that I would like to avoid.

LN: What are you planning to do now?

Now the main part of our strategy is working with people. The plan is to work with people not only during an election campaign, but consistently, by supporting citizens' initiatives which exist throughout the country, even in small villages. The goal of this strategy is to make us comprehensible to people - to make people understand what we are doing and to allow them to understand that what we are doing is useful for them. We want to leave the political ghetto.

LETTERS

A Letter from Belarus

Dear colleagues and friends,

This is Andrei Yakushonok from Belarus. I am 26 years old. I live in Miadziel, a small town in northern Belarus. Since 2001, I have been an active supporter of democratic changes in our country.

I am a member of the Miadziel regional organization of the United Civil Party of Belarus and an active worker of Solidarity of the Miadziel district. The leader (Coordinator) of Solidarity of the Miadziel district is Andrei Abalevich.

From October until December 2006, I have studied in a university in Usti nad Labem in the Czech Republic, in the department of political science and philosophy. I have studied there political science and sociology as well as the structure of EU Parliament, EU Commission, EU Rights and EU Constitution. I became interested in the history of USA. For me this knowledge is very useful! I also improved my knowledge of English and Czech. Moreover, I met there a former Czech senator , with whom I had very interested discussions. It is very important for the Belarusian opposition to learn about the Czech experience in democratic reforms , because Czech Republic and Belarus are very much alike.

However, I want to inform you what happened to me after I returned from Czech Republic to Belarus on 26th of December 2006. On that day Miadziel KGB called me for evidence.

The employee of Miadziel KGB was very much interested in what I did in the Czech Republic. He already knew that I spent two months studying there. He interrogated me for an hour, trying to get more information about my studies. Then he began to intimidate me, threatening to apply more severe measures if I do not stop my opposition political activities.

Nevertheless, I am not afraid about myself. Andrei Abalevich, the coordinator of Miadziel district Solidarity, is in a much more difficult situation. I am afraid about him very much!

He cannot return to Belarus because the KGB will persecute and intimidate him in our country. If he returns to Belarus, he will be imprisoned for his activities in the democratic opposition against the dictatorial regime.

Thanks for spending time in perusing this letter.

Sincerely,
Andrei Yakushonok

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